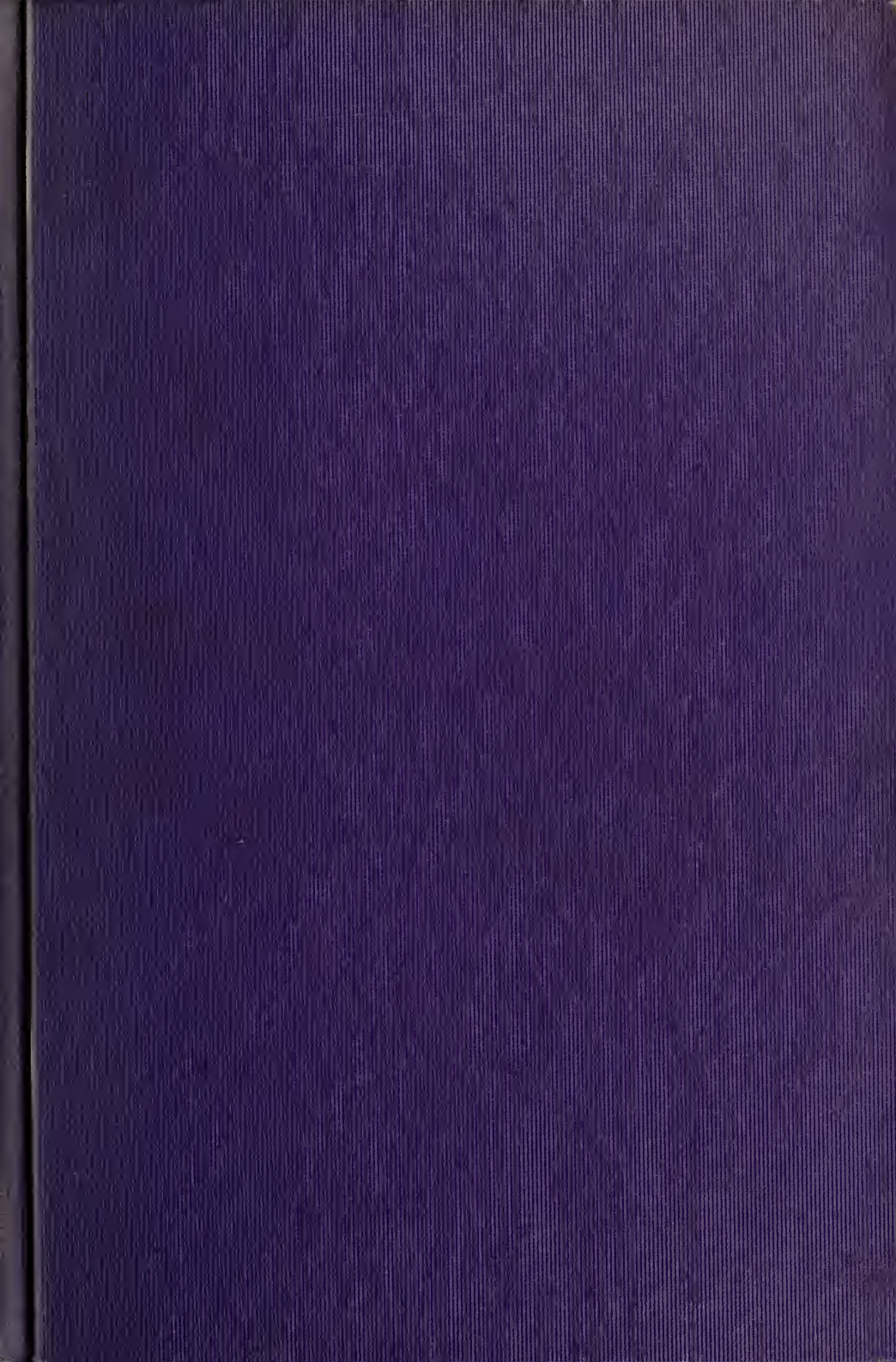




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REALISTS

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THE REALISTS

ÉMILE ZOLA

A PAGE OF LOVE

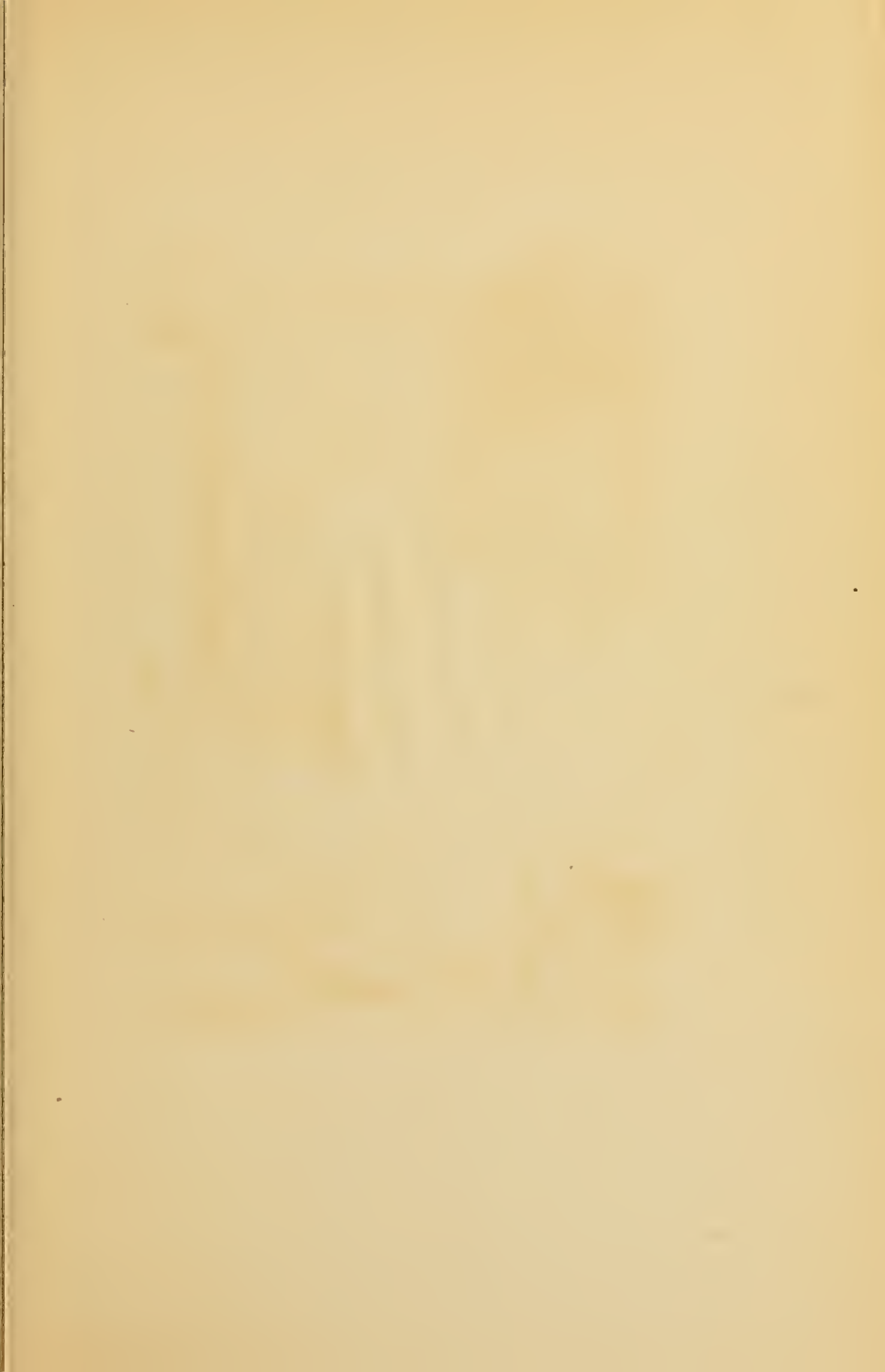
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THIS EDITION OF
A PAGE OF LOVE
HAS BEEN COMPLETELY TRANSLATED

BY
T. F. ROGERSON, M. A.

THE ETCHINGS ARE BY

ALBERT DUVIVIER

AND DRAWINGS BY
ÉDOUARD DANTAN

A PAGE OF LOVE

PART FIRST

I

The night-lamp, with its bluish shade, was burning on the mantel-piece, behind a book whose shadow darkened quite half of the room. It was a steady glimmer that crossed the round table and the long chair, bathed the thick folds of the velvet curtains, tinged with blue the mirror of the violet-ebony wardrobe placed between the two windows. The bourgeois harmony of the room, that blue of the hangings, of the furniture and of the carpet, assumed a vague cloudy softness at that nocturnal hour. And, opposite the windows, on the side in shadow, the bed, also hung with velvet, formed a black mass, lightened only by the whiteness of the sheets. Hélène, her hands crossed, in her peaceful attitude of mother and widow, was breathing lightly.

Amid the silence, the clock struck one. The noises of the quarter had died out. On those

heights of the Trocadéro, only the distant rumbling of Paris reached. Hélène's slight breathing was so gentle that it did not swell the chaste line of her throat. She was sleeping a beautiful sleep, peaceful and robust, with her correct profile and her tightly knotted chestnut hair, her head inclined as if she had gone to sleep while listening. At the farther end of the room the large open door of an alcove pierced the wall with its square of darkness.

But not a sound arose. The half-hour struck. The pendulum had a feeble beat, under that power of sleep that dominated the entire room. The night-lamp slept, the furniture slept; on the table, near a lamp that had gone out, a piece of woman's work slept. Hélène, asleep, kept her grave and kindly mien.

When two o'clock struck, that peace was disturbed, a sigh emerged from the darkness of the alcove. Then there was a rustling of linen, and silence set in again. Now, an oppressed breathing was heard. Hélène had not moved. But, suddenly, she arose. A confused lisping of a suffering child had awakened her. She was

raising her hands to her temples, all sleepy as she was, when a low cry made her leap on the carpet.

"Jeanne! — Jeanne! — what ails you? answer me!" she asked.

And, as the child was silent, she murmured, while running to take hold of the lamp:

"My God! she was not well, I should not have lain down."

She briskly entered the adjoining room, in which a dull silence had supervened. But the lamp, covered with oil, gave a trembling light that sent only a round spot to the ceiling. Hélène, leaning against the iron bedstead, could distinguish nothing at first. Then, in the bluish glimmer, between the thrown-back sheets, she saw Jeanne stiff, her head thrown backward, the muscles of her neck rigid and hard. The poor adorable countenance was disfigured by contraction; her eyes were open, fixed on the curtain-pole.

"My God! my God!" she exclaimed, "my God! she is dying!"

And, setting down the lamp, she touched her daughter with her trembling hands. She was

unable to find her pulse. Her heart seemed to have stopped. Her little arms, her little legs were stretched violently. Then Hélène became distracted, taking fright, stammering:

“My child is dying! Help!—— My child! My child!”

She came back into the room, turning and striking herself, not knowing whither she was going; then she re-entered the alcove and again threw herself in front of the bed, still calling for help. She had taken Jeanne in her arms, she was kissing her hair, moving her hands over her body, entreating her to answer. A word, a single word. Where was she in pain? Did she want a little of the potion she had the other day? Perhaps the air would have revived her? And she persisted in her determination to hear her speak.

“Tell me, Jeanne, oh! tell me, I beg of you!”

My God! and to know not what to do! Like that, suddenly, in the night. Not even any light. Her ideas were becoming confused. She continued chatting to her daughter, interrogating her and answering for her. It was in the stomach

that she was ailing ; no, in the throat. It would be nothing. Quiet was necessary. And she made an effort to become self-possessed. But the sensation of having her daughter stiff in her arms stirred her to her heart's core. She looked at her, convulsed and without respiration ; she tried to reason, to resist the necessity of crying out. Suddenly, in spite of herself, she cried out.

She passed through the dining-room and the kitchen, calling :

“Rosalie ! — Rosalie ! — Quick, a doctor ! — My child is dying !”

The girl, who slept in a small room behind the kitchen, uttered alarming cries. H  l  ne had returned running. She was parading in her chemise, without seeming to feel the cold of that freezing February night. That girl, then, would let her child die ! One minute had scarcely elapsed. She returned to the kitchen, and re-entered the room, and, quickly, groping in the dark, got into a petticoat, and threw a shawl over her shoulders. She upset the furniture, filled with the wildness of her despair that room in which so quiet a peace slept.

Then, her feet in slippers, leaving the doors open, she herself went down the three flights of stairs, possessed by the idea that she only could bring a doctor.

When the janitress had drawn the cord, Hélène found herself outside, her ears buzzing, her head swimming. She went rapidly down the Rue Vineuse, and rang at Doctor Bodin's, as he had already attended Jeanne; a servant-girl, after a delay that seemed eternal, came to answer her that the doctor was with a woman in confinement. Hélène remained dumfounded on the sidewalk. She knew no other doctor in Passy. For an instant she tramped the streets, looking at the houses. A light, freezing wind was blowing; she walked in her slippers in a light snow, which had fallen that evening. And she had ever her daughter before her, with that anguishing thought that she was killing her by not finding a doctor at once. Then, as she was going back along the Rue Vineuse, she clung to a bell. She was always going to ask; they would perhaps give her an address. She rang again, because they did not hurry. The wind was making

her thin petticoat cling to her legs, and the plaits of her hair were flying.

At last a man-servant came to open and told her that Doctor Deberle was in bed. She had rung at a doctor's. Heaven, then, was not abandoning her! Then she pushed the servant aside so as to enter. She repeated:

"My child, my child is dying! — Tell him to come."

It was a small dwelling full of draperies. She thus went up one story, struggling with the servant, to all remarks only answering that her child was dying. Having reached a room, she desired to wait. But, as soon as she heard on one side the doctor getting up, she approached, she spoke through the door:

"Immediately, monsieur, I entreat you — My child is dying!"

And when the doctor appeared in his waistcoat, without cravat, she dragged him away, she would not let him further clothe himself. He had recognized her. She lived in the adjoining house and was his tenant. And so, when he made her

cross a garden as a short cut, by passing through a communicating door that was between the two houses, she suddenly recovered her memory.

"'Tis true," she murmured, "you are a physician, and I knew it — You see, I have become crazy — Let us hurry!"

On the stairway, she wished him to go first. She would not have brought God to her house in a more devout fashion. Upstairs, Rosalie had remained with Jeanne, and she had lighted the lamp placed on the table. As soon as the doctor entered, he seized this lamp, and threw a bright light on the child, who remained painfully rigid; only her head had slipped, rapid spasms contracted her face. For a minute, he said nothing, his lips pinched. Hélène was looking at him anxiously. When he noticed that mother's look imploring him, he murmured:

"It will be nothing — But she must not be left here. She needs air."

Hélène, with a strong movement, raised her on her shoulders. She would have kissed the doctor's hands for his kind words, and a calmness

pervaded her. But hardly had she laid Jeanne in her large bed when that poor little girl's small body was agitated by violent convulsions. The doctor had removed the shade from the lamp, a white light filled the room. He went to open a window, ordered Rosalie to draw the bed outside the curtains. H  l  ne, again seized with anguish, stammered :

"But she is dying, monsieur! — See, then, see then! — I no longer recognize her!"

He did not answer, but watched the attack with close attention. Then he said :

"Go into the alcove, hold her hands so that she does not scratch herself — There, gently, without violence — Do not be uneasy, the crisis must take its course."

And both, leaning over the bed, held Jeanne, whose limbs were relaxed with the sharp shocks. The doctor had buttoned his vest to conceal his bare neck. H  l  ne had remained enveloped in the shawl which she had thrown over her shoulders. But Jeanne, in struggling, drew a corner of the shawl, and unbuttoned the top of the vest. They did not notice it. Neither saw the other.

The attack, however, subsided. The little one seemed to sink into a state of great feebleness. Though he reassured the mother as to the outcome of the crisis, the doctor remained anxious. He was still looking at the patient, and at last put short questions to Hélène, who remained standing by the bedside.

"How old is the child?"

"Eleven years and a half, monsieur."

There was silence. He shook his head, stooped to raise Jeanne's closed eyelids and to look at the mucous membrane. Then he continued his questioning, without raising his eyes to Hélène.

"Did she have convulsions while young?"

"Yes, monsieur, but those convulsions disappeared about the age of six — She is very delicate. For some days past, I have noticed her being ill at ease. She had cramps, fits of absent-mindedness."

"Do you know of nervous diseases in your family?"

"I do not know — My mother died of consumption."

She hesitated, seized with shame, not wanting to acknowledge a grandmother shut up in a mad-house. Her whole ancestry was tragical.

"Be careful!" said the physician earnestly, "there is a fresh attack."

Jeanne had just opened her eyes. At first, for an instant, she looked around her in a wandering way, without uttering a word. Then her look became fixed, and her body was thrown back, the members were stretched and stiff. She was very red. All of a sudden she turned pale, with a livid pallor, and the convulsions became apparent.

"Do not loose her!" the doctor continued. "Take hold of her other hand."

He ran to the table, on which, as he entered, he had laid down a small medicine-case. He returned with a flask, from which he made the child inhale. But it was like a terrible blow of a whip, Jeanne received such a shock that she escaped from her mother's hands.

"No, no, no ether!" exclaimed the mother, warned by the odor. "Ether makes her silly."

Both were hardly able to hold her. She had violent contractions, raised herself on her heels and the back of her head, as if bent double. Then she fell back, she rocked from side to side of the bed. Her fists were clenched, the thumb bent towards the palm; at moments she opened them, and, the fingers spread, she tried to lay hold of objects in space so as to twist them. She came in contact with her mother's shawl, she clutched at it. But what especially tortured the latter was, as she said, no longer to recognize her daughter. Her poor angel, with so sweet a countenance, had her features distorted, her eyes sunk in their orbits, showing their bluish mother-of-pearl hue.

"Do something, I entreat you," she murmured. "I feel I can no longer bear it, monsieur."

She had just recalled that the daughter of one of her neighbors, at Marseilles, had died, smothered in a similar crisis. Perhaps the doctor was deceiving her in order to spare her. She believed, at each second, that she felt on her face Jeanne's last breath, and that her irregular respiration was stopping. Then, distracted, upset from pity and terror, she

wept. Her tears fell on the child's innocent, bare form, for she had thrown off the coverings.

The doctor, however, with his long, nimble fingers, made slight pressures on the lower part of the neck. The intensity of the attack diminished. Jeanne, after a few slackened movements, remained inert. She had fallen back into the middle of the bed, her body stretched out, her arms extended, her head supported by the pillow and leaning on her chest. One might have thought her a Christ-child. Hélène stooped and gave her a long kiss on the forehead.

"Is it over?" she said in an undertone. "Do you think there will be any more attacks?"

He made an evasive gesture. Then he replied:

"In any case, the others will be less violent."

He had asked Rosalie for a glass and a decanter. He half filled the glass, took out two more flasks, counted some drops, and, with the aid of Hélène, who raised the child's head, he introduced a spoonful of this potion between the clenched teeth. The lamp was burning very high, with its white flame, lighting up the disorder of the room, in which the

articles of furniture were upset. The garments that Hélène threw on the back of an arm-chair as she went to bed had slipped to the floor and encumbered the carpet. The doctor, having stepped on a corset, picked it up so as not to tread on it again. An odor of vervain came from the unmade bed and from that scattered linen. It was a woman's entire secrecy unwillingly displayed. The doctor went himself to get the wash-basin, wet a piece of linen, and applied it to Jeanne's temples.

"Madame, you are going to catch cold," said Rosalie, who was shivering. "We might perhaps shut the window — The air is too keen."

"No! no!" Hélène exclaimed, "leave the window open — Is it not so, monsieur?"

Slight gusts of wind were entering, raising the curtains. She did not feel them. The shawl, however, had fallen completely from her shoulders, uncovering the upper part of the throat. Behind, her unfastened hair let stray locks fall down to the small of her back. She had released her bare arms, so as to be more ready, forgetful of everything, having no longer any feeling but for her child.

And, in front of her, busy, the doctor did not think any more of his open vest, of his shirt collar that Jeanne had just torn off.

"Raise her up a little," he said. "No, not so — Give me your hand."

He took her hand, placed it himself under the child's head, as he desired to make her take a spoonful of the potion. Then he called the mother close to him. He made use of her as of an assistant, and she was religiously obedient, on seeing that her daughter seemed more calm.

"Come — You are going to rest her head on your shoulder, while I will sound her."

Hélène did what he ordered. Then he leaned over her, so as to place his ear against Jeanne's chest. He had grazed her bare shoulder with his cheek, and on listening to the child's heart, he might have been able to hear the mother's heart beat. When he raised himself, his breath met Hélène's.

"There is nothing the matter there," he said quietly, whilst she rejoiced. "Lay her down again, it is not necessary to trouble her any more."

But a fresh attack came. It was much less serious. Jeanne uttered some disconnected words. Two other attacks, at short intervals, proved abortive. The child had fallen into a prostration which seemed again to disturb the doctor. He had laid her down, with her head very high, the covering brought up under the chin, and for nearly an hour he remained there, to watch her, seeming to await the normal sound of respiration. On the other side of the bed, Hélène was also waiting, without stirring.

Little by little, a great calm came over Jeanne's face. The lamp illumined her with a pale light. Her countenance resumed its adorable oval, somewhat lengthened, of the grace and fineness of a goat. Her beautiful closed eyes had large bluish and transparent lids, under which one perceived the sombre splendor of her look. Her slender nostrils distended lightly, her somewhat large mouth had a vague smile. And she slept thus, on the tresses of her outspread ink-black hair.

"This time, it is over," said the doctor in an undertone.

And he turned around, arranging his flasks, getting ready to leave. Hélène approached, entreating.

"Oh! monsieur," she murmured, "do not leave me. Wait a few minutes. If further attacks take place — It is you who have saved her."

He signified that there was nothing more to be feared. Yet he remained, wishing to reassure her. She had sent Rosalie to bed. Ere long, day dawned on the snow that whitened the roofs, a mild and gray dawn. The doctor went to shut the window. And amid the silence both exchanged but few words, in a very low voice.

"Nothing serious is the matter with her, I assure you," he said. "Only, at her age, it is necessary to be very careful — See especially that she leads an even, happy life, free from shock."

After an instant, Hélène said in her turn:

"She is so delicate, so nervous — I am not always mistress of her. Over trifles, she has joys and sorrows that disturb me, so keen are they — She loves me passionately, jealously, so that she sobs when I caress another child."

He shook his head, repeating :

“Yes, yes, delicate, nervous, jealous — It is Doctor Bodin who attends her, is it not? I will confer with him about her. We will decide on an energetic treatment. She is at the period of life when a woman’s health is decided.”

On seeing him so devoted, H  l  ne felt an impulse of gratitude.

“Ah! monsieur, let me thank you for all the trouble that you have taken!”

Then, having raised her voice, she came and leaned over the bed, fearing lest she had awakened Jeanne. The child was asleep, quite rosy, with her vague smile on her lips. A sense of languor pervaded the hushed room. A collected and, as it were, comforted drowsiness had again rested on the hangings, the furniture, the scattered garments. Everything was bathed and refreshed in the early daylight entering by the two windows.

H  l  ne was again standing by the bedside. The doctor kept himself at the other side of the bed. And between them was Jeanne, sleeping and breathing lightly.

"Her father was often ill," H  l  ne continued softly, returning to the questioning. "As for me, I have always been in good health."

The doctor, who had not yet looked at her, raised his eyes, and could not help smiling, so sound and strong did she seem to him. She smiled also, with her happy, peaceful smile. Her splendid health made her happy.

However, he did not withdraw his glances from her. Never had he seen beauty more correct. Tall, magnificent, she was a nut-brown Juno, nut-brown gilded with fair reflections. When she turned her head slowly, her profile took on the grave purity of a statue. Her gray eyes and white teeth lit up her whole face. She had a round, somewhat strong chin, which gave her an appearance of firmness and of being meditative. But what astonished the doctor was the beauty of form that mother disclosed. The shawl had again slipped, the throat was uncovered, the arms remained bare. A heavy tress of hair, the color of burnished gold, flowed over her shoulder and was lost between her breasts. And, in the face of a great sorrow, in her carelessly fastened

petticoat, disheveled and in disorder, she preserved a majesty, a nobleness of purity and of modesty, that even under a man's glance left her chaste.

She, for an instant, examined him. Doctor Deberle was a man of thirty-five, with a shaven, somewhat long face, a fine eye, and thin lips. As she looked at him, in her turn she noticed that his neck was bare. And thus they remained face to face, with little Jeanne asleep between them. But that space, immense but a moment ago, seemed to have been narrowed. The child was breathing too lightly. Then, Hélène, with a slow hand, again drew up her shawl and covered herself, while the doctor buttoned the collar of his vest.

"Mamma, mamma," Jeanne lisped in her sleep.

She awoke. When she had opened her eyes, she saw the doctor and was uneasy.

"Who is it? who is it?" she asked.

But her mother kissed her.

"Sleep, my darling, you have been suffering somewhat — He is a friend."

The child seemed surprised. She did not remember anything. Sleepiness came over her again, and

once more she slumbered, murmuring in a tender tone :

“Oh! I am sleepy! —— Good-evening, little mother —— If he is your friend, he will be mine.”

The doctor had put his medicine-case out of sight. He gave a silent salute and retired. Hélène listened for a moment to the child's breathing. Then she forgot herself, seated on the edge of the bed, her looks and mind wandering. The lamp, left lighted, was growing pale in the broad daylight.

II

Next day, H       thought that it was proper to go and thank Doctor Deberle. The abrupt manner in which she had forced him to follow her, the whole night spent by him with Jeanne, left her embarrassed, in view of a service that seemed to her to be outside the ordinary visits of a physician. Yet she hesitated for two days, this step being repugnant to her for reasons that she could not have explained. These hesitations made her think much about the doctor ; one morning she met him, and hid herself like a child. She was greatly annoyed immediately by this impulse of timidity. Her peaceful and straightforward nature protested against that trouble which was entering her life. And so she decided that she would go and thank the doctor that very day.

The little one's crisis had taken place in the night between Tuesday and Wednesday, and it was then Saturday. Jeanne felt herself completely recovered. Doctor Bodin, who being very anxious, had hastened to her, had spoken of Doctor Deberle with the respect of a poor old physician of the neighborhood for a rich young fellow-professional who was already famous. He related, however, smiling with an expression of shrewdness, that the fortune came from the elder Deberle, a man whom all Passy venerated. The son had simply had the trouble of inheriting a million and a half and a superb practice. A very able fellow, moreover, Doctor Bodin made haste to add, and one with whom he would feel much honored to enter into consultation, in the matter of the dear health of his little friend Jeanne.

About three o'clock, Hélène and her daughter went down and had only a few steps to take in the Rue Vineuse, to ring at the adjoining house. Both were still in deep mourning. The door was opened by a valet de chambre in a dress-coat and white cravat. Hélène recognized the wide

vestibule, hung with oriental portières, but to right and to left there were jardinières filled with flowers in profusion. The valet had shown them into a small salon with reseda hangings and furniture. And he waited, standing. Then Hélène gave him her name :

“Madame Grandjean.”

The valet opened the door of a salon decorated in yellow and black, of extraordinary brilliancy ; and, stepping back, he repeated :

“Madame Grandjean.”

Hélène, on the threshold, felt an impulse to recede. She had just perceived, at the other end, near the mantel-piece, a young lady seated on a narrow settee, which the width of her skirts wholly occupied. In front of her, an aged woman, who had taken off neither her hat nor her shawl, was on a visit.

“Excuse me,” Hélène murmured, “I wanted to see Doctor Deberle.”

And she again took hold of Jeanne's hand, whom she had sent in ahead of her. It astonished and embarrassed her to fall thus on this

young lady. Why had she not asked for the doctor? She knew, however, that he was married.

Madame Deberle was just finishing a narrative in a rapid and somewhat sharp voice:

“Oh! it is wonderful, wonderful! —— She dies with realistic effect! —— Look! she clutches her breast like that, she throws back her head, and she turns quite green —— I adjure you, Mademoiselle Aurélie, to go and see her ——”

Then she arose, came to the door, making a great rustle of stuffs, and said with charming good grace:

“Pray come in, madame, I beg you —— My husband is not here —— But I shall be very happy, very happy, I assure you —— It must be that pretty girl who was suffering so much the other night. I pray you, be seated for a moment.”

Hélène had to accept an arm-chair, while Jeanne timidly placed herself on the edge of a chair. Madame Deberle had sunk again upon her little settee, adding with a pretty laugh:

“It is my day. Yes, I receive on Saturday —— Then, Pierre introduces everybody. The other

week he brought to me a colonel who had the gout”

“You are silly, Juliette!” murmured Mademoiselle Aurélie, the aged lady, a poor old friend, who had seen her come into the world.

There was a brief silence. Hélène took a look at the richness of the salon, at the curtains and at the black and gold seats that dazzled with the brilliance of stars. Flowers bloomed on the mantel-piece, on the piano, on the tables; and, through the window-panes, entered the clear light from the garden, the leafless trees and bare ground of which were visible. It was very warm, the even heat of a stove; in the fire-place a single log was being reduced to embers. Then, with another look, Hélène understood that the brilliancy of the salon was a happily chosen frame. Madame Deberle had hair of an inky black and a milk-white skin. She was small, plump, slow and graceful. In all that gold, under the dark, thick head-covering that she wore, her pale complexion was tinted with a vermilion reflection. Hélène found her really adorable.

"They are frightful, convulsions are," Madame Deberle had continued. "My little Lucien has had them, but in his very young days — How uneasy you must have been, madame! At any rate, this dear child seems quite well now."

And, whilst drawing out her phrases, she was looking at Hélène in her turn, surprised and delighted at her great beauty. Never had she seen a woman of a more royal mien, in those black garments that draped the widow's tall and severe figure. Her admiration was betrayed by an involuntary smile, whilst she was exchanging a glance with Mademoiselle Aurélie. Both were examining her in so unaffectedly delighted a manner that she, as well as they, indulged in a slight smile.

Then Madame Deberle stretched herself gently on her settee, and taking up the fan hanging at her girdle:

"You were not at the opening of the Vaudeville, yesterday, madame?"

"I never go to the theatre," Hélène replied.

"Oh! little Noëmi was wonderful, wonderful! — She dies with most realistic effect! —"

She grasps her breast like this, she throws back her head, she becomes all green —— The effect was prodigious.”

For an instant she discussed the playing of the actress, whom, moreover, she defended. Then she passed to the other attractions of Paris,—an exposition of paintings at which she had seen unheard-of canvases, a stupid romance for which much claim was set up, a risky adventure of which she spoke in veiled words to Mademoiselle Aurélie. And she went on thus from one subject to another, without fatigue, her voice ready, living therein as in her own element. Hélène, a stranger to that world, was satisfied with listening and put in a word from time to time, a brief reply.

The door opened and the valet announced:

“Madame de Chermette —— Madame Tissot ——”

Two ladies entered, in full toilet. Madame Deberle advanced briskly; and the train of her black silk dress, heavily loaded with trimmings, was so long that she removed it with a kick of her heel every time that she turned around.

For an instant there was a rapid murmur of soft voices.

"How kind you are! — I never see you!"

"We are coming for that lottery, you know?"

"Certainly, certainly."

"Oh! we cannot sit down. We have twenty houses yet to visit."

"Come, you are not going to run away."

And the two ladies at last sat down on the edge of a settee. Then the soft voices were heard again, more acute.

"Eh? yesterday, at the Vaudeville?"

"Oh! superb!"

"You know that she unclasps herself and lowers her hair. The whole effect is in that."

"Some pretend that she swallows something so as to become green."

"No, no, the motions are studied — But it was necessary to find them first."

"It is prodigious!"

The two ladies had arisen. They disappeared. The salon then resumed its late peace. On the mantel-piece, hyacinths exhaled a very penetrating

perfume. For an instant there was heard in the garden the noisy quarrel of a flock of sparrows that were fighting on a lawn. Madame Deberle, before sitting down again, went to pull down the embroidered tulle blind of a window in front of her; and she resumed her place in the softened gold lights of the salon.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "they trespass on us ——"

And, very affectionately, she chatted calmly with Hélène. She appeared in part to know her history, no doubt through the gossipings of the house, which belonged to her. With a boldness¹ full of tact, and into which a great deal of friendship seemed to enter, she spoke to her of her husband, of that frightful death in a hotel, the Hôtel du Var, Rue de Richelieu.

"And you had just arrived, had you not? You had never been to Paris —— It must be dreadful, that mourning among strangers, on the morrow of a long journey, and when one does not yet know where to set one's foot."

Hélène shook her head slowly. Yes, she had spent very terrible hours. The disease that was to

carry off her husband had suddenly manifested itself, on the day after their arrival, just as they were about to go out together. She did not know a street, she was ignorant even as to what quarter she was in; and, for a week, she remained shut up with the dying man, listening to all Paris growling beneath her window, feeling herself alone, abandoned, lost, as if in the depths of a solitude. When, for the first time, she set foot again on the sidewalk, she was a widow. The thought of that large bare room, filled with medicine bottles, and where the trunks had not even been opened, still gave her a shudder.

"Your husband, I have been told, was almost double your age?" Madame Deberle asked with an air of profound interest, whilst Mademoiselle Aurélie listened with both ears, so as to lose nothing.

"No, indeed," Hélène replied, "he was hardly six years older than I."

And she allowed herself, in a few phrases, to go on relating the story of her marriage: the great love that her husband had conceived for her, when she was living with her father, the hatter Mouret, in

the Rue des Petites-Maries, in Marseilles; the obstinate opposition of the Grandjean family, a wealthy family of refiners, who were exasperated because of the young girl's poverty; she told of the sad and furtive nuptials, after the legal notifications, and of their precarious life, until the day when an uncle, on dying, had bequeathed to them an income of about ten thousand francs. It was at that time that Grandjean, who cherished a hatred against Marseilles, had decided that they would come and settle in Paris.

"At what age, then, were you married?" Madame Deberle further asked:

"At seventeen."

"You must have been very pretty."

The conversation ceased. Hélène had not seemed to hear.

"Madame Manguelin," the valet announced.

A young woman appeared, reserved and stiff. Madame Deberle hardly rose. She was one of her protégées who came to thank her for a service. She remained but a few minutes, and withdrew, with a courtesy.

Then Madame Deberle resumed the conversation, speaking of the Abbé Jouve, whom both of them knew. He was a humble curate of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, the Passy parish church; but his charity made him the most beloved and most respected priest of the quarter.

"Oh! a blessing!" she murmured with a devout mien.

"He was very good to us," said Hélène. "My husband had known him of old, at Marseilles — As soon as he knew of my misfortune, he took charge of everything. It was he who installed us at Passy."

"Has he not a brother?" Juliette asked.

"Yes, his mother married twice — Monsieur Rambaud knew my husband also — He established, in the Rue de Rambuteau, a large specialty in oils and products of the South, and, I think, is making a great deal of money."

Then she added with gayety:

"The Abbé and his brother form my entire court."

Jeanne, who was getting weary sitting on the edge of her chair, was looking at her mother with

an air of impatience. Her fine long countenance betrayed suffering, as if she had regretted all that was being said there; and she seemed, at moments, to be scenting the oppressive and strong perfumes of the salon, casting oblique glances at the furniture, distrustful, warned of vague dangers by her exquisite sensibility.

Then she rested her glances on her mother with a controlling adoration.

Madame Deberle noticed the child's uneasiness.

"There," she said, "is a little girl who is weary of being staid like a grown-up person — See, there are picture-books on that table."

Jeanne went to take an album; but her glances, over the book, were supplicatingly directed toward her mother. Hélène, charmed by the gracious surroundings in which she found herself, did not move; she was of a calm temperament and willingly remained seated for hours. However, as the valet in rapid succession announced three ladies, Madame Berthier, Madame de Guiraud, and Madame Levasseur, she thought she ought to get up.

But Madame Deberle exclaimed:

“Stay, then, I must show you my son.”

The circle was enlarged around the fire-place. All these ladies spoke at the same time. There was one of them who said she was fatigued ; and she told that, for five days past, she had not gone to bed before four o'clock in the morning. Another complained bitterly of nurses ; an honest one was no longer to be found.

Then the conversation turned on seamstresses. Madame Deberle argued that a woman could not make costumes well ; it took a man. Meanwhile, two ladies were whispering in an undertone, and as there was silence, three or four words were heard : all commenced to laugh, and fan themselves with a languishing hand.

“Monsieur Malignon,” the servant announced.

A tall young man entered, very correctly dressed. He was greeted with slight exclamations. Madame Deberle, without rising, extended her hand to him, saying :

“Well ! yesterday, at the Vaudeville ?”

“Rotten !” he exclaimed.

“What ! rotten !—— She is wonderful, when she clasps her body and throws back her head ——”

"Don't speak of it! it is repugnantly realistic."

Then they discussed.

Realism was very soon said. But the young man wanted nothing of realism.

"In nothing, do you hear!" he said, raising his voice, "in nothing! it degrades art."

They would finish by seeing pretty things on the boards! Why did not Noëmi push the consequences to the extreme? And he made an attempt at a gesture that scandalized all those ladies. Fie! horror! But Madame Deberle having applied her phrase to the prodigious effect that the actress produced, and Madame Levasseur having related that a lady had lost consciousness in the balcony, it was agreed that it was a great success. That brought the discussion to a close.

The young man, in an arm-chair, stretched himself out amid the displayed skirts. He appeared to be very intimate at the doctor's. He had mechanically taken a flower from a flower-pot and was chewing it.

Madame Deberle asked him :

"Have you read the romance —— ?"

But he did not let her finish, and answered in a tone of superiority :

“I read only two romances a year.”

As for the exposition of the Cercle des Arts, it was truly not worth one's going to any trouble about. Then, all the topics of the day being exhausted, he came and leaned his elbow on Juliette's little settee, and exchanged some words with her in a low voice, while the other ladies were chatting briskly with one another.

“Well! he has gone out,” exclaimed Madame Deberle on turning round. “I met him, an hour ago, at Madame Robinot's.”

“Yes, and he is going to Madame Lecomte's,” said Madame Deberle. “Oh! he is the busiest man in Paris.”

And, addressing Hélène, who had followed this scene, she continued :

“A very distinguished youth whom we love a great deal — He has an interest in the business of an exchange-broker. Very rich, moreover, and informed as to everything.”

The ladies left.

"Adieu, dear madame, I count on you Wednesday."

"Yes, that's so, on Wednesday."

"Tell me, shall we see you at that evening party? One never knows with whom one finds one's self. I will go, if you are going."

"Well, I will go, I promise you. My best regards to Monsieur de Guiraud."

When Madame Deberle returned, she found Hélène standing in the middle of the parlor.

Jeanne was pressing herself against her mother, whose hand she had taken hold of; and, with her nervous and caressing fingers, she was drawing her by slight tugs towards the door.

"Ah! it is true," murmured the mistress of the house.

She rang for the maid.

"Pierre, tell Mademoiselle Smithson to bring Lucien."

And, after a moment's interval, the door was opened again, familiarly, without any one being announced. A beautiful girl of sixteen entered, followed by a little old man with a chubby and rosy countenance.

"Good-day, sister," said the young girl as she embraced Madame Deberle.

"Good-day, Pauline —— good-day, father ——," the latter replied.

Mademoiselle Aurélie, who had not budged from the chimney-corner, rose to salute Monsieur Letelier. This gentleman kept a large silk-goods establishment, in the Boulevard des Capucines. Since his wife's death, he was in the habit of taking his youngest daughter everywhere, in quest of a fine marriage.

"You were yesterday at the Vaudeville?" Pauline asked.

"Oh! prodigious!" mechanically repeated Juliette, standing in front of a glass, trying to set a rebellious lock of hair right.

Pauline had the pout of a spoiled child.

"How vexing it is to be a young girl, one can see nothing! —— I went with papa as far as the door, at midnight, to learn how the piece had gone."

"Yes," said the father, "we met Malignon —— He thought it very good."

"Well!" Juliette exclaimed, "he was here a little while ago, he declared it rotten —— One never knows how to understand him."

"You have had a great many people?" Pauline asked, jumping briskly to another subject.

"Oh! a great crowd! all those ladies! They have not all gone. I am dead ——"

Then, thinking that she was forgetting to proceed to a formal introduction, she interrupted herself:

"My father and my sister —— Madame Grand-jean ——"

And they started up a conversation on children and on the small ailments that disturb mothers so much, when Mademoiselle Smithson, an English governess, presented herself, holding a little boy by the hand. Madame Deberle sharply spoke a few words to her in English, to scold her for having kept them waiting.

"Ah! there is my little Lucien!" exclaimed Pauline, who with a great rustling of skirts got on her knees in front of the child.

"Let him go, let him go," said Juliette. "Come here, Lucien; come and say good-day to this girl."

The little boy advanced, embarrassed.

He was at most seven years old, fat and short, dressed as daintily as a doll. When he saw that everybody was looking at him and smiling, he stopped; and, with his blue eyes expressing astonishment, he was examining Jeanne.

"Come," his mother murmured.

He glanced at her inquiringly, and took another step. He displayed the characteristic dulness of a boy, his shoulders raised, his lips thick and pouting, and his slight frown giving him a sly expression.

Jeanne must have intimidated him, because she was serious, pale and all in black.

"My child, you must be agreeable also," said Hélène, on seeing her daughter's stiff attitude.

The little girl had not let go her mother's wrist; and she was passing her fingers over the skin, between the sleeve and the glove. With bowed head, she was waiting for Lucien with the restless air of a wild and nervous girl, ready to run away if she were caressed. However, when her mother pushed her gently, she in her turn took a step.

"Mademoiselle, you will have to embrace him," Madame Deberle continued, laughing. "The ladies must always begin with him —— Oh! the big dunce!"

"Embrace him, Jeanne," said Hélène.

The child raised her eyes to her mother; then, as if won by the little boy's sheepish air, seized with a sudden tenderness in the presence of his kind but embarrassed face, she gave him an adorable smile. Her countenance was lit up under the sudden impulse of a strong internal passion.

"Willingly, mamma," she murmured.

And, taking Lucien by the shoulders, almost lifting him, she kissed him vigorously on both cheeks. Then he wanted to embrace her.

"That's right!" exclaimed all the visitors.

Hélène saluted and reached the door, accompanied by Madame Deberle.

"I beg you, madame," she said, "to be so good as to express my best thanks to the doctor —— He rescued me the other night from a mortal uneasiness."

"Henri is not here, then?" Monsieur Letellier interrupted.

"No, he will come back late," Juliette replied.

And seeing Mademoiselle Aurélie get up to leave with Madame Grandjean, she added :

"But you stay for dinner with us, that is settled."

The old maid, who waited for this invitation every Saturday, decided to take off her shawl and her hat. They were being stifled in the salon. Monsieur Letellier had just opened a window, in front of which he remained planted, very much interested in a lilac that was already budding. Pauline was romping with Lucien, amid chairs and arm-chairs, thrown in confusion by the visitors.

Then, on the threshold, Madame Deberle extended her hand to Hélène with a gesture full of friendly frankness.

"Permit me," she said. "My husband had spoken to me of you, I felt myself drawn to you. Your misfortune, your solitude — Indeed, I am very happy to have seen you, and I expect that we shall see more of each other."

"That I promise you and I thank you," replied Hélène, deeply touched by this impulse of affection,

in the house of that lady who had appeared to her to have her head a little turned.

They still held each other's hand, and were looking each other straight in the face, smiling. Juliette with a caressing air confessed the reason for her sudden friendship.

"You are so pretty that one cannot help loving you!"

Hélène began to laugh gayly, for her beauty did not disturb her. She called Jeanne, whose attention was engrossed in the play of Lucien and Pauline.

But Madame Deberle kept the little girl for a moment longer, continuing:

"You are good friends from this time on, say *au revoir* to each other."

And the two children sent each other a kiss from the tips of their fingers.

III

Every Tuesday, Hélène had Monsieur Rambaud and the Abbé Jouve to dinner. It was they who, in the early times of her widowhood, had forced her door and bore her company at meals with amicable familiarity, to draw her at least once a week from the solitude in which she was living. Then, those Tuesday dinners had become a veritable institution. The guests found themselves there, as a duty, precisely as it struck seven, with the same quiet pleasure.

On that Tuesday, Hélène, seated near a window, was working at a piece of needlework, taking advantage of the last glimmers of twilight, while waiting for her invited guests. She passed her days there, in a very sweet calm. On those heights the hum of the city died out. She loved that large room, so calm, with its bourgeois luxury, its

violet-ebony, and its blue velvet. When her friends had installed her, in the first weeks, before she had occupied herself with anything, she had suffered a little from that heavy splendor in which Monsieur Rambaud had just expressed his ideal of art and of comfort, to the keen admiration of the Abbé, who had declined to utter an opinion; but she had at last come to be very happy in those surroundings, on finding them solid and simple, like her heart. The heavy curtains, the dark and substantial furniture, added to her peace. The only recreation that she took during her long hours of work was to give a look at the vast horizon, at the great Paris that unfolded before her the rolling sea of its roofs. Her corner of solitude opened on that immensity.

“Mamma, I no longer see clearly,” said Jeanne, seated near her on a low chair.

And she let her work fall, looking at Paris which was wrapped in great shadows. Ordinarily she was far from noisy. To induce her to go out, it was necessary for her mother to get angry; by Doctor Bodin’s formal order, she took her for two hours

every day to the Bois de Boulogne; and that was their only walk, they had not gone to Paris three times in eighteen months. Nowhere did the child seem more cheerful than in the large blue room. Hélène had to give up having her taught music. An organ playing in the silence of the quarter left her trembling, with her eyes moist. She assisted her mother in sewing layettes for the Abbé Jouve's poor.

Night had completely come, when Rosalie entered with a lamp. She appeared quite beside herself with the excitement and heat of the cooking. The Tuesday dinner was the only event of the week that put the house in commotion.

"Those gentlemen, then, are not coming this evening, madame?" she asked.

Hélène looked at the clock.

"It is a quarter of seven, they will be here soon."

Rosalie was a present from the Abbé Jouve. He had taken her from the Orléans railway station, the day on which she landed there, so that she did not know a pavement of Paris. She had been sent to him by an old fellow-student in the seminary, the

pastor of a Beauce village. She was short, fat, with a round face under her narrow bonnet, her hair black and harsh, with a flattened nose and a red mouth. And she excelled in plain dishes, for she had grown up in the parsonage, with her godmother, the pastor's servant.

"Ah! there is Monsieur Rambaud!" she said, as she went to open the door, before the bell had rung.

Monsieur Rambaud, tall and square, showed his broad provincial notary's figure. His forty-five years found him already quite gray. But his large blue eyes kept the astonished, unaffected and sweet expression of a child's.

"And there is the Abbé, all our people are come!" continued Rosalie, as she again opened the door.

Whilst Monsieur Rambaud, after having pressed Hélène's hand, was sitting down without speaking, smiling like a man who is at home, Jeanne had thrown herself on the Abbé's neck.

"Good-day, dear friend!" she said. "I have been very ill."

"Very ill, my dear?"

The two men became uneasy, especially the Abbé, a small, dry man, with a large head, awkward, dressed diabolically, and whose half-shut eyes grew larger and were filled with a beautiful gleam of tenderness. Jeanne, resting one of her hands in his, had given the other to Monsieur Rambaud. Both were holding her and were brooding over her with their anxious looks. Hélène had to tell about the crisis. The Abbé became almost angry, because she had not notified him. And they questioned her: at least it is well over, the child had nothing more the matter with her? The mother smiled.

"You love her more than I do, you would end by frightening me," she said. "No, she has felt nothing more, some pains in the limbs only, with dull feelings in the head — But we are going to fight energetically against all that —"

"Madame is served," the housemaid came to announce.

The dining-room was furnished in mahogany, with a table, a sideboard and eight chairs. Rosalie went to draw the red rep curtains. A very simple

hanging light, a white porcelain lamp in a copper ring, lit up the covers, the plates duly set and the smoking soup. Every Tuesday, the dinner brought up the same conversation. But, on that day, they naturally chatted about Doctor Deberle. The Abbé Jouve bestowed great praise on him, though the doctor was scarcely devout. He mentioned him as a man of upright character, of a charitable heart, a very good father and a very good husband, setting, in short, the best example. As for Madame Deberle, she was excellent, in spite of the somewhat flashy deckings that she owed to her singular Parisian education. In a word, a charming household. Hélène seemed happy; she had so judged the household, and what the Abbé said to her, led her to continue relations that at first frightened her a little.

"You shut yourself up too much," the priest declared.

"Without a doubt," supported Monsieur Rambaud.

Hélène looked at them with her gentle smile, as if to say to them that they sufficed for her and that

she dreaded every new friendship. But ten o'clock struck, the Abbé and his brother took their hats. Jeanne had just gone to sleep in an arm-chair, in the room. They leaned down for an instant, nodded their heads with a satisfied air on seeing her sleeping so calmly. Then they left on tiptoe; and, in the antechamber, with lowered voice:

"Until Tuesday."

"I was forgetting," murmured the Abbé, who went back two steps. "Mother Fétu is ill. You ought to go and see her."

"I will go to-morrow," Hélène answered.

The Abbé gladly sent her to the houses of his poor. They had all sorts of conversation together in a low voice, business of their own, as to which they understood each other at a hint, and of which they never spoke in the presence of others.

Next day, Hélène went out alone; she avoided taking Jeanne with her, as the child had been shivering for two days, on returning from a visit of charity to the house of an old man who was a paralytic. Outside, she followed the Rue Vineuse, took the Rue Raynouard, and entered the

Passage des Eaux, a strange stairway hemmed in between the walls of the neighboring gardens, a steep lane that goes down to the Quai, from the Passy heights. At the bottom of this slope, in a dilapidated house, Mother Fétu dwelt in an attic lighted by a round skylight, and the furniture consisted of a wretched bed, a lame table, and a chair that had lost its straw seat.

"Ah! my good lady, my good lady ——" she began to whine, when she saw Hélène enter.

Mother Fétu was lying down. Quite rotund in spite of her poverty, as if bloated and with her face puffed up, she pulled up with her numbed hands the strip of cloth that covered her. She had small, cunning eyes, a peevish voice, a noisy humility that communicated itself in a tide of words.

"Ah! my good lady, I thank you! —— Oh! so, so, what I am suffering! It is as if dogs were eating my side —— Oh! it is certain, I have a beast in my belly. Hold, it is there, you see. The skin is not broken, the pain is inside —— Oh! so, so, it has not stopped for two days. How is it

possible, good God! to suffer so much! — Ah! my good lady, thanks! You do not forget the poor folks. It will be counted for you, yes, it will be counted for you —”

Hélène had sat down. Then, noticing a pot of tisane smoking on the table, she filled a cup that was beside it, and handed it to the patient. Near the pot were a package of sugar, two oranges, and other sweet things.

“Has any one been to see you?” she asked.

“Yes, yes, a little lady. But she doesn’t know — That is not at all what I ought to have. Ah! if I had a little meat! The neighbor-woman would cook it — My, my, it pinches me more severely. True, one would think a dog was doing it — Ah! if I had a little broth —”

And in spite of the sufferings that were torturing her, with her shrewd eyes she was following Hélène, who was busily rummaging her pocket. When she saw her lay a ten-franc piece on the table, she lamented still more, making efforts to get seated. While struggling, she stretched out her arm, the coin disappeared, whilst she repeated:

"My God! it is another crisis. No, I can no longer endure like that — God will give it back to you, my good lady. I will tell Him to give it back to you — See, they are pains that are shooting through all my body — The Abbé had promised me that you would surely come. It is only you who know what to do. I am going to buy a little meat — See how it is going down into my thighs. Help me! I can do no more, I can do no more! —"

She wanted to turn round. Héléne drew off her gloves, took hold of her as gently as possible, and laid her down again. As she was still bending over, the door opened, and she was so surprised to see Doctor Deberle enter, that a blush mounted to her cheeks. He also, then, had visits of which he did not speak?

"It is the doctor," the old woman stammered. "You are both very good! May Heaven bless you all!"

The doctor had saluted Héléne with reserve. Mother Fétu, as soon as he had entered, no longer whined so vigorously. She kept up only a little

hissing wail which she continued like a child that is suffering. She had seen clearly that the good lady and the doctor were acquainted with each other, and she no longer took her gaze from them, going from one to the other with a slow working of the thousand wrinkles on her countenance. The doctor put some questions to her, and sounded her right side. Then, turning towards Hélène, who had just sat down again, he murmured:

"It is hepatic colic. She will be on her feet in a few days."

And, tearing a page from his note-book on which he had written some lines, he said to Mother Fétu:

"Here, you will have this taken to a druggist in the Rue de Passy, and every two hours you will take a spoonful of the potion that will be given to you."

Then, again, she burst out in benedictions. Hélène remained seated. The doctor seemed to delay, when, looking at her, their eyes met. Then he saluted and was the first to withdraw, from

discretion. He had not gone down one flight before Mother Fétu resumed her groanings.

“Ah! what a fine doctor! — Provided his remedy does something for me! I should have crushed tallow with dandelion, that carries off the water that is in my body — Ah! you can say that in him you know a fine doctor! You have known him perhaps for a long time? — My God! how thirsty I am — I have fire in my blood — He is married, is he not? — He well deserves to have a good wife and fine children — Indeed, it gives one pleasure to see that good folks know each other.”

Hélène had arisen to give her a drink.

“Well, good-bye, Mother Fétu,” she said. “Until to-morrow.”

“That is so — How good you are! — If I had only a little linen! See my chemise, it is in two. I have been lying on a dunghill — That is no matter, the good God will give you back all that.”

Next day, when Hélène arrived, Doctor Deberle was with Mother Fétu. Seated on the chair, he

was writing a prescription, whilst the old woman was talking with her lachrymose volubility.

"Now, sir, it is like a piece of lead — For sure, I have lead in my side. It weighs a hundred pounds, I cannot turn."

But when she saw Hélène, she still did not stop.

"Ah! it is the good lady — I said so indeed to this dear gentleman: She will come, should the sky fall, she would come just the same — A true saint, an angel from paradise, and beautiful, so beautiful that one would go on one's knees in the streets to see her pass — My good lady, it is doing no better. At this hour, I have a lump of lead, there — Yes, I have told him all that you did for me. The Emperor would do no more — Ah! one would have to be very wicked not to love you, very wicked —"

Whilst she was firing off these phrases as she rolled her head on the bolster, her small eyes half-shut, the doctor was smiling at Hélène, who remained quite embarrassed.

"Mother Fétu," she murmured, "I have brought you a little linen —"

“Thanks, thanks, God will pay you back —— It is like this dear gentleman, he is doing more good to the poor people than all the folks whose trade it is. You do not know that he has attended me for four months; and remedies, and broth, and wine. One does not find many rich people like that, so honest with each one. Still another angel of the good God —— Oh! my, my, it is a fine going-on that I have in my belly ——”

In his turn, the doctor seemed embarrassed. He arose, and wanted to give his chair to Hélène. But the latter, though she had come with the idea of spending a quarter of an hour there, refused, saying:

“Thank you, monsieur, I am in a great hurry.”

Meanwhile, Mother Fétu, while continuing to roll her head, had just stretched out her arm, and the package of linen had disappeared under the bed-clothes. Then she continued:

“Ah, one may well say that you make a pair —— I say that without meaning to offend you, because it is true —— Who has seen one, has seen the other. Good folks understand each other ——

My God! give me your hand that I may turn! ——
Yes, yes; they understand each other ——”

“Good-bye, Mother Fétu,” said Hélène, who left the place to the doctor. “I do not think that I shall come this way to-morrow.”

However, she went up again the following day. The old woman was asleep. As soon as she awoke and recognized her, all in black, on the chair, she exclaimed:

“He has been —— True, I do not know what he has made me take, I am stiff as a stick —— Ah! we talked about you. He asked me all sorts of things, and whether you were ordinarily sad, and if you had always the same appearance. He is such a good man!”

She had slackened her speech, she seemed to watch the effect of her words on Hélène’s countenance, with that wheedling and anxious air of the poor who want to give people pleasure. No doubt she thought she saw, on the good lady’s brow, a wrinkle of discontent, for her heavy bloated countenance, expanded and lit up, and relaxed all of a sudden. She continued, stammering:

"I am always sleeping. Perhaps I have been poisoned — There is a woman, in the Rue de l'Annonciation, whom a druggist has killed by giving her one drug instead of another."

Hélène, on that day, stayed nearly half an hour at Mother Fétu's, listening to her speak of Normandy, where she was born, and where they drank excellent milk. After a silence :

"Have you known the doctor for a long time?" she asked, carelessly.

The old woman, stretched out on her back, half raised her eyelids and then shut them.

"Ah! yes, indeed!" she replied, in an almost low voice. "His father attended me before '48, and he accompanied him."

"I have been told that the father was a good man."

"Yes, yes — A little harebrained — The son, you see, is much better. When he touches you, you would think he had velvet hands."

There was renewed silence.

"I advise you to do all that he tells you," Hélène continued. "He is very skilful, he has saved my daughter."

"Sure enough!" exclaimed Mother Fétu, who became animated. "One can have confidence, he resuscitated a little boy whom they were going to carry away — Oh! you will not prevent me from saying so, there are not two like him. I am in luck, I fall in with the cream of good folks — And so, I thank the good God every evening. I do not forget either of you, see! You are together in my prayers — May the good God protect you and grant you all that you can wish! May He overwhelm you with His treasures! May He keep for you a place in His paradise!

She had raised herself, and, her hands clasped, she seemed to implore Heaven with extraordinary fervor. Hélène let her remain thus for a long time, and she even smiled. The old woman's babbling humility at last soothed her and lulled her in a very gentle manner. When she left, she promised her a bonnet and a dress, for the day on which she would get up.

The whole week, Hélène was occupied with Mother Fétu. The visit that she made to her each afternoon became a part of her habits. She had,

above all, taken a particular liking to the Passage des Eaux. That steep alley pleased her by its freshness and its silence, by its always clean pavement, which was washed, on rainy days, by a torrent flowing from the heights. When she arrived, she had, from above, a strange sensation, looking at the sinking of the steep incline of the passage, which was generally deserted, and known to only a few inhabitants of the neighboring streets. Then she ventured, she entered through an arch, under the house that faces the Rue Raynouard; and by short paces she went down the seven flights of wide steps, beside which passes the bed of a pebbly stream, occupying the middle of the narrow alley. The walls of the gardens right and left, bulged out, eaten away as by a gray leprosy; trees extended their branches, there was a wealth of foliage, ivy spread out the drapery of its thick mantle; and all that verdure, which shut out everything but blue patches of the sky, produced a very mild and very unobtrusive greenish light. In the middle of the descent, she stopped to breathe, interesting herself in the reflecting lamp that hung there, listening

to laughter in the gardens, behind gates that she had never seen opened. Sometimes an old woman ascended, helping herself by the iron railing, black and glossy, fastened to the right-hand wall; a lady was leaning on her umbrella as on a cane; a band of street urchins scampered down, making a clatter with their shoes. But nearly always she was alone, and a great delight was that retired and shaded stairway, like a hollow road in the forest. Below, she raised her eyes. The view of that steep slope, on which she had just risked herself, gave her a slight fear.

At Mother Fétu's, she entered with the freshness and peace of the Passage des Eaux in her garments. That hole of poverty and sorrow no longer shocked her. She behaved there as in her own home, opening the round skylight to renew the air, moving the table when it was in her way. The bareness of that garret, the walls whitewashed with lime, the dilapidated furniture, brought her back to a simplicity of existence that she had sometimes dreamt of, while a young girl. But what especially delighted her was the tender emotion in which she lived there: her

part of sick-nurse, the old woman's continual lamentations, all that she saw and felt around her, caused her to shudder compassionately. She had at last come to await with visible impatience the visit of Doctor Deberle. She questioned him as to Mother Fétu's condition; then, they chatted for an instant about something else, standing near each other, looking each other straight in the face. An intimacy grew up between them. They were astonished at discovering that they had similar tastes. They often understood each other without opening their lips, their hearts suddenly bathed in the same overflowing charity. And, to Hélène, nothing was sweeter than that sympathy, which is developed under unusual circumstances and to which she gave way without resistance, quite softened with pity. She had been afraid of the doctor at first; in her parlor, she would have preserved the distrustful coldness of her nature. But there, they found themselves far from the world, sharing the only chair, almost happy with those poor and ugly things that brought them together, while softening their hearts. At the end of the week, they knew

each other as if they had lived for years side by side. Old Mother Fétu's den was filled with light, in that communion of their kindness.

Meanwhile, the old woman recovered quite slowly. The doctor was surprised and accused her of pampering herself, when she told him that now her legs were as heavy as lead. She was always whining, she remained on her back, to turn her head; and she closed her eyes, as if she were not observing them. One day she appeared to be even asleep; but, from under her eyelashes, a corner of her small black eyes was spying them. At last, she had to get up. Next day, Hélène brought to her the dress and the bonnet that she had promised. When the doctor was there, the old woman suddenly exclaimed:

"My God! and the neighbor-woman who told me to see to her stew!"

She went out, she pulled the door after her, leaving them alone together. They at first continued their conversation, without noticing that they were shut in.

The doctor urged Hélène to go over sometimes to spend the afternoon in his garden, in the Rue Vineuse.

"My wife," he said, "has to return your visit, and she will renew my invitation to you — It would do your daughter a great deal of good."

"But I do not refuse, only I do not wish people to come after me in grand ceremony," she said, laughing. "Only, I am afraid of being imprudent — Well, we will see."

They chatted on. Then, the doctor became astonished.

"Where the devil has she gone? It is a quarter of an hour since she went out about that stew."

Hélène then saw that the door was shut. That did not shock her at once. She spoke of Madame Deberle, whom she praised highly to her husband. But, as the doctor was continually turning his head in the direction of the door, she at last began to feel embarrassed.

"It is very singular that she is not returning," she murmured in her turn.

Their conversation ceased. Hélène, not knowing what to do, opened the skylight; and when she turned round, they avoided looking at each other. Children's laughter sounded through the skylight,

which outlined a pale moon, very high, in the heavens. They were quite alone, concealed from the looks of all, having only this round aperture that overlooked them. The children became silent in the distance; a chilly stillness reigned. No one would have come to look for them in that lost garret. Their embarrassment increased. Then H  l  ne, dissatisfied with herself, looked fixedly at the doctor.

"I am overwhelmed with visits," he said at once. "As she does not come back, I am off."

And he departed. H  l  ne was seated.

Mother F  tu returned immediately—with a flood of words.

"Ah! I cannot drag myself along, I have had a fit of weakness—— He has left, then, the dear gentleman? For certain, there are no conveniences here. You are both of you angels from heaven, to spend your time with an unfortunate woman like me. But the good God will pay all that back to you—— It has gone down into the feet to-day. I have had to sit down on a step. And I knew no more, because you made no noise—— In

fine, I would like to have some chairs. If I had only an arm-chair! My mattress is very bad. I am ashamed when you come —— The whole house is yours, and I would throw myself into the fire, if it were necessary. The good God knows it, I tell it to Him often enough —— O my God! see that the good gentleman and the good lady are satisfied in all their desires. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen!"

Hélène was listening, and she felt a strange embarrassment. Mother Fétu's bloated countenance disturbed her. Never, moreover, had she felt such uneasiness in the narrow room. She saw its sordid poverty, she was suffering from want of air, from all the accompaniments of poverty shut up there. She hastened to get away, hurt by the benedictions with which Mother Fétu pursued her.

Another sorrow awaited her in the Passage des Eaux.

In the middle of that passage, to the right on going down, there is in the wall a sort of excavation, some abandoned well, enclosed by a railing.

For two days past, on passing, she heard, at the bottom of this hole, the mewings of a cat.

As she was going up, the mewings began again, but so lamentable that they were heart-rending.

The thought that the poor animal, thrown into the old well, would slowly die of hunger there, all of a sudden broke Hélène's heart.

She hastened her step, with the thought that she would not dare for a long time to brave going down the stairway, for fear of hearing there that mewing of death.

It was Tuesday.

In the evening at seven o'clock, as Hélène was finishing a woman's small vest, the two customary rings of the bell sounded, and Rosalie opened the door, saying :

"It is the Abbé who arrives first to-day — Ah! There is Monsieur Rambaud."

The dinner was very pleasant, Jeanne was still improving, and the two brothers, who were spoiling her, got leave for her to eat a little salad, which she greatly relished, in spite of Doctor Bodin's formal prohibition.

Then, when they passed into the room, the encouraged child hung on her mother's neck, murmuring :

"I entreat you, little mother, take me to-morrow to the old woman's."

But the priest and Monsieur Rambaud were the first to scold her. One could not take her to the houses of the unfortunate, since she did not know how to behave herself there. The last time, she had two fainting fits, and during three days, even while she slept, her swollen eyes were weeping.

"No, no," she repeated, "I will not weep, I promise it."

Then, her mother embraced her, saying:

"It is useless, my darling, the old woman is doing very well —— I will not go out again, I will remain every day with you."

IV

The following week, when Madame Deberle returned Madame Grandjean's visit, she showed an amiability full of tenderness. And, on the threshold, as she was retiring :

"You know what you have promised me — The first fine day you will go down to the garden and you will bring Jeanne. It is an order from the doctor."

Hélène smiled.

"Yes, yes, the matter is understood. Count on us."

Three days later, on a clear February afternoon, she went down, in fact, with her daughter. The janitress opened the communicating door for them. At the farther end of the garden, in a sort of greenhouse transformed into a Japanese pavilion, they found Madame Deberle, having with her her sister

Pauline, both of them with their hands unoccupied, with embroidery work on a little table, on which they had laid it and forgotten it.

“Ah! how amiable, then, it is of you!” said Juliette. “See, come here —— Pauline, push that table —— You see, it is still a little cool, when one remains seated, and from this pavilion we can very well watch the children. Come, play, my children —— Take especial care not to fall.”

The large bay-window of the pavilion was open, and from each side they had taken out the movable panes from their frames; so that the garden was in full view, as on the threshold of a tent. It was a bourgeois garden, with a central lawn, flanked by two flower-beds. A simple railing enclosed it from the Rue Vineuse; but such a curtain of verdure had grown there that from the street no look could pry into it; ivy, clematis, honeysuckle clung to and entwined about the gate, and, behind this first wall of foliage, there was a second, consisting of lilac and laburnum. Even in winter, the persistent leaves of the ivy and the interlacing of the branches sufficed to bar the view. But the great charm was some

tall forest-trees, at the lower end, superb elms that masked the black wall of a five-story house. They gave, in that small space crowded by the neighboring buildings, the illusion of a corner of a park and seemed to immeasurably enlarge that Parisian diminutive garden, which one swept as one would a parlor. Between two elms hung a swing, the seat of which had been turned green by the damp air.

Hélène looked, stooped in order to see better.

"Oh! it is a hole," said Madame Deberle, carelessly. "But, at Paris, trees are so rare — One is very lucky to have half a dozen of them to one's self."

"No, no, you are very well off," Hélène murmured. "It is charming."

That day, in the pale sky, the sun gave out rays of wan light. There was, between the leafless branches, a light shower of rays. The trees were becoming ruddy, one saw the fine violet-hued buds softening the gray tone of the bark. And on the lawn, along the alleys, the grass and the gravel had patches of light, which a light mist, on the surface of the ground, was bathing and

melting. There was not a flower, only the cheerfulness of the sun on the naked earth announcing spring.

"Now, it is still a little sad," continued Madame Deberle. "You will see in June that one is in a real nest. The trees prevent people at the side from spying, and we are then completely to ourselves ——"

But she interrupted herself to exclaim :

"Lucien, you will please not go near the fountain !"

The little boy, who was doing the honors of the garden for Jeanne, had just led her in front of a fountain, under the high flight of steps, and there he had turned the spigot, presenting the toe of his boots so as to soften them. It was a trick that he delighted in. Jeanne, very grave, was looking at him wetting his feet.

"Wait !" said Pauline, who arose, "I am going to make him keep quiet."

Juliette held her back.

"No, no, you are more giddy than he. The other day, one would have believed that both of

you had taken a bath —— It is singular that a big girl cannot remain two minutes seated."

And, turning :

"Do you hear, Lucien, shut off the spigot at once!"

The child, frightened, wished to obey. But he turned the key still more, the water flowed with a force and a noise that at last made him lose his head. He drew back, splashed up to the shoulders.

"Shut off the spigot at once!" repeated his mother, whose cheeks were empurpled by a rush of blood.

Then Jeanne, mute until that time, approached the fountain with all sorts of precautions, whilst Lucien burst into sobs, in the face of that enraged water of which he was afraid and which he no longer knew how to stop. She put her skirt between her legs, stretched out her bare hands so as not to wet her sleeves, and shut the spigot without receiving a single splash. Suddenly, the deluge ceased; Lucien, astonished, struck with respect, restrained his tears and raised his large eyes to the girl.

"Truly, that child drives me out of my wits!" continued Madame Deberle, who again became quite white and stretched herself as if worn out with fatigue.

Hélène thought she ought to interfere.

"Jeanne," she said, "take hold of his hand, play at taking a walk."

Jeanne took hold of Lucien's hand, and gravely they went off through the alleys, with short steps. She was much taller than he, he had his arm in the air; but that majestic play, which consisted in turning ceremoniously around the lawn, seemed to absorb both of them and to give great importance to their persons. Jeanne, like a true lady, had her looks wandering and distracted. Lucien could not help, at moments, risking a glance at his companion. They did not say a word to each other.

"They are droll," murmured Madame Deberle, smiling and calmed. "It must be admitted that your Jeanne is a very charming child — She is so obedient, so well-behaved —"

"Yes, when she is at other people's houses," Hélène replied. "She has wild moments. But

as she adores me, she tries to be good so as not to give me trouble."

Those ladies chatted about the children. Girls were more precocious than boys. However, Lucien's stupid air must not be relied on. Before a year, when he would be somewhat developed, he would be a lively chap.

And without apparent transition, they came to speak of a woman who dwelt in a little pavilion opposite, and at whose house things were going on — Madame Deberle stopped to say to her sister :

"Pauline, go, then, for a minute into the garden."

The young girl left quietly and remained under the trees. She was accustomed to being left outside, every time that in conversation something turned up that was too coarse to be spoken of in her hearing.

"Yesterday, I was at the window," Juliette continued, "and I plainly saw that woman — She does not even draw the curtains — It is indecent! Children might see it."

She spoke very low, in a scandalized tone, with a slight smile, however, in the corner of her lips. Then, raising her voice, she called :

“Pauline, you may return.”

Under the trees, Pauline was staring about her, with an indifferent mien, waiting until her sister had finished. She entered the pavilion and returned to her chair, while Juliette continued, addressing Hélène :

“You have never noticed anything, have you, madame ?”

“No,” replied the latter, “my windows do not look on the pavilion.”

Notwithstanding the break in the conversation, the young girl listened, with her white virgin countenance, as if she had understood.

“Ah, well!” she said, as she still looked out through the door, “the nests in the trees look pretty !”

Meanwhile, Madame Deberle had resumed her embroidery, from habit. She made a couple of stitches every few minutes. Hélène, who could not remain unoccupied, asked permission to bring

work, another time. And feeling somewhat weary, she turned about and examined the Japanese pavilion. The walls and the ceiling were hung with stuffs decked with gold, with flocks of cranes in full flight, butterflies and bright flowers, landscapes in which blue barks were sailing on yellow rivers. There were seats and flowerpots of iron-wood, on the ground were fine mats, and, encumbering lacquer furniture, quite a world of knick-knacks, little bronzes, little porcelain vases, strange speckled playthings of bright colors. At the lower end, a large baboon in Saxony porcelain, the legs bent, the belly bare and protruding, shone with wonderfully comic good-humor, while furiously shaking his head at the slightest push.

“Eh! he is rather ugly!” exclaimed Pauline, who had followed Hélène’s looks. “Say, then, sister, you know that all you have purchased is of camlet. The handsome Malignon calls your Japanese collection ‘the thirteen-sou bazaar’ — By the way, I have met him, the handsome Malignon. He was with a lady, oh! a lady, the little Florence, of the Variétés.”

"Tell me where, so that I can tease him!" Juliette said, eagerly.

"On the boulevard — Is he not coming to-day?"

But she received no answer. Those ladies were uneasy about the children, who had disappeared. Where could they be? And as they called them, two sharp voices were raised.

"We are here!"

They were there, indeed, in the middle of the lawn, seated in the grass, half-concealed by a spindle-tree.

"What is it you are doing, then?"

"We have arrived at the inn!" Lucien exclaimed.

"We are resting in our room."

For an instant, they looked at them, greatly amused. Jeanne lent herself to the play complacently. She was cutting grass around her, no doubt to prepare breakfast. The travelers' trunk was represented by a plank end, which they had picked up at the bottom of a pile of building material. Now they were chatting. Jeanne was very much in earnest, repeating with conviction

that they were in Switzerland and that they were going to set out to visit the glaciers, which seemed to puzzle Lucien.

"There! look at him!" said Pauline all of a sudden.

Madame Deberle turned around and saw Malignon, who was coming down the flight of stone steps. She scarcely gave him time to salute and be seated.

"Well, you are a fine fellow, you! to go and say everywhere that I have only camlet at my house!"

"Ah! yes," he replied, quietly, "that little salon — Certainly it is of camlet. You have not an article that is worth the trouble of being looked at."

She was very much piqued.

"What! the porcelain figure?"

"Oh, no, oh, no! all that is a bourgeois affair — Taste is necessary. You were not willing to entrust me with the arrangement —"

Then she interrupted him, quite red, really in anger.

"Your taste, let us speak of it! It is pretty, your taste is — Some one has met you with a lady —"

"What lady?" he asked, surprised by the severity of the attack.

"A fine choice, I compliment you upon it. A girl that all Paris —"

But she was silent on noticing Pauline. She had forgotten her.

"Pauline," she said, "go, then, for a minute into the garden."

"Ah! no, that becomes tiresome at last!" declared the young girl, who was rebellious. "They are always upsetting me."

"Go into the garden!" Juliette repeated with more severity.

The young girl went away, looking sulky. Then she turned round to add:

"Hurry up, at least!"

As soon as she was gone, Madame Deberle again attacked Malignon. How could a young man as distinguished as he was, show himself in public with that Florence? She was at least forty years

old, she was ugly enough to scare one, the whole orchestra was familiar with her on her first appearances.

"Have you finished?" exclaimed Pauline, who was walking under the trees with a pouting air. "I am getting weary, I am."

But Malignon defended himself. He did not know that Florence; never had he spoken to her. People might have seen him with a lady, he sometimes accompanied the wife of one of his friends. Moreover, who was the person who had seen him? Proofs, witnesses, were necessary.

"Pauline!" Madame Deberle abruptly asked, raising her voice, "did you not meet him with Florence?"

"Yes, yes," replied the young girl, "on the boulevard, in front of the Bignon house."

Then, Madame Deberle, triumphant at the sight of Malignon's embarrassed smile, exclaimed:

"You may return, Pauline. That's the end of it."

Malignon had a box for the next day, at the Folies-Dramatiques. He offered it gallantly, without seeming to entertain any ill-will against Madame

Deberle; moreover, they were always quarreling. Pauline wanted to know if she could go to see the piece that they were playing; and as Malignon laughed, shaking his head, she said that it was very stupid, that authors should have been obliged to write pieces for young girls. She was allowed only the *Dame Blanche* and the classic plays.

In the meantime, those ladies were no longer watching the children. All of a sudden Lucien uttered terrible cries.

"What have you done to him, Jeanne?" Hélène asked.

"I have done nothing to him, mamma," replied the little girl. "He threw himself on the ground."

The truth was that the children had just set out for the famous glaciers. As Jeanne was pretending that they had arrived on the mountains, both of them raised their feet quite high, in order to clamber over the rocks. But Lucien, panting from that exercise, had made a misstep and was spread out flat in the middle of a border. Once on the ground, much annoyed, seized with a vicious madness, he had burst into tears.

"Lift him up!" Hélène called out anew.

"He does not want to, mamma, he is rolling."

And Jeanne drew back, as if hurt and irritated at seeing the little boy so badly reared. He did not know how to play, he was certainly going to soil her. She had the wry face of a duchess who was being compromised. Then Madame Deberle, whom Lucien's cries made impatient, entreated her sister to pick him up and make him keep quiet. Pauline did not desire anything better. She ran, threw herself on the ground beside the child, rolled for an instant with him. But he struggled, he did not want any one to take him up. She arose, however, holding him under her arms, and to pacify him:

"Hush, you bawler!" she said. "We are going to swing."

Lucien became suddenly silent, Jeanne lost her serious air, and an ardent joy lit up her countenance.

All three ran towards the swing. But it was Pauline who took the seat.

"Push me," she said to the children.

They pushed her with all the might of their little hands. Only she was heavy and they scarcely moved her.

"Push, then," she repeated. "Oh! the big block-heads, they do not know how."

Within the pavilion, Madame Deberle had just shivered slightly. She found that it was cool, in spite of that fine sun. And she had begged Malignon to pass her a white cashmere wrap that was hanging on a window-fastener. Malignon had risen to lay the wrap on her shoulders. Both were chatting familiarly of things that interested H  l  ne very little. And so she, restless, fearing lest Pauline, without meaning it, should upset the children, went into the garden, leaving Juliette and the young man to discuss a style of hats that interested them intensely.

As soon as Jeanne saw her mother, she approached her, in a wheedling way, her entire attitude supplicating.

"Oh! mamma, dear mamma," she murmured. "Oh! mamma ——"

"No, no," replied H  l  ne, who understood her. "You know that it is forbidden to you."

Jeanne passionately enjoyed swinging. It seemed to her that she became a bird, she said. That wind which blew on her face, that sudden flight, that continuous come and go, regular as the motion of a wing, produced in her the delightful sensation of a departure for the clouds. She believed she was going up above. But it always ended badly. On one occasion, they had found her clinging to the ropes of the swing, fainting, her large eyes open, but staring vacantly. On another occasion, she had fallen, as stiff as a swallow struck with a shot.

"Oh! mamma," she continued, "only a little, a very, very little."

Her mother, in order to have peace, at last placed her on the seat. The child, with a devout expression, brightened up, and her bare hands showed her joy, in a slight trembling. And, as H  l  ne swung her very gently:

"Stronger, stronger!" she murmured.

But H  l  ne did not listen to her. She did not let go the rope. She became animated herself, her cheeks rosy, all vibrating with the pushes that she

was giving to the seat. Her habitual gravity melted into a sort of comradeship with her daughter.

"That's enough," she declared, as she lifted Jeanne in her arms.

"Then swing yourself, please do swing yourself!" said the child, who had remained clinging to her neck.

She was most anxious to see her mother fly, as she called it, taking still more delight in looking at her than in swinging herself. But the latter laughingly asked who would push her; when she played, she, it was a serious matter: she mounted higher than the trees. Just at that moment, Monsieur Rambaud appeared, led by the janitress. He had met Madame Deberle at Hélène's, and he considered that he might present himself, not having found the latter at her rooms. Madame Deberle showed herself very gracious, touched by the good man's kindly nature. Then she launched anew into a very lively conversation with Malignon.

"Our good friend is going to push you! our good friend is going to push you!" Jeanne exclaimed, as she danced around her mother.

"Will you be quiet! we are not at home," said H  l  ne, who affected an air of severity.

"*Mon Dieu!*" murmured Monsieur Rambaud, "if that amuses you, I am at your service. When one is in the country ——"

H  l  ne let herself try. When she was a young girl, she swung for hours, and the memory of those distant parties filled her with a dull desire. Pauline, who had sat down with Lucien at the edge of the lawn, interfered with her free air of an emancipated, grown-up girl.

"Yes, yes, the gentleman is going to swing you. Afterwards he will swing me. Will you not, monsieur, you will swing me?"

That decided H  l  ne. The youth that was in her, hidden under the cold propriety of her great beauty, broke out with charming ingenuousness. She showed herself simple and gay as a boarding-school girl. Above all, she had no prudery. Laughing, she said that she did not want to show her legs, and she asked for a cord with which she tied her skirts above her ankles. Then, mounted standing on the seat, her arms spread

out and holding the ropes, she exclaimed, joyfully:

“Go on, Monsieur Rambaud — Gently at first!”

Monsieur Rambaud had hung his hat on a branch. His broad and fine face was lit up with a paternal smile. He made sure of the strength of the ropes, looked at the trees, and decided to give a slight push. Hélène, for the first time, had appeared out of mourning. She wore a gray dress, trimmed with mauve bows. And, quite erect, she started slowly, touching the ground as if rocked.

“Go on, go on!” she said.

Then Monsieur Rambaud, his arms in front, seizing the seat in transit, gave it a brisker motion. Hélène ascended; at each flight, she went higher. But the movement was still sober. They saw her, still correct, somewhat serious, with very bright eyes in her lovely, quiet countenance; only, her nostrils were swollen, as if to drink in the breeze. Not a fold of her skirts had slipped. A tress of her hair had become loose.

"Go on! go on!"

A sudden push raised her up. She mounted into the sunlight, ever higher. A breeze was stirred by her and traversed the garden; and she passed so quickly that one no longer clearly distinguished her. Now she must be smiling, her face was rosy, her eyes sparkled like stars. The unknotted tress was striking her neck. In spite of the cord that bound them, her skirts floated and showed the whiteness of her ankles. It was clear that she was at ease, her chest free, and living in the air as in her native element.

"Go on! go on!"

Monsieur Rambaud, perspiring, his face red, exerted all his strength. There was a shout. Hélène was still mounting.

"Oh! mamma! oh! mamma!" Jeanne repeated in ecstasy.

She had sat down on the lawn, she was looking at her mother, her little hands clasped on her breast as if she would herself have drunk in all that air that was blowing. She was breathless, she was following instinctively with a rhythmic

movement of her shoulders the long oscillations of the swing. And she cried out:

“Stronger! stronger!”

Her mother was still mounting. Above, her feet touched the branches of the trees.

“Stronger! stronger! oh! mamma, stronger!”

But Hélène was away up in the open sky. The trees bent and crackled as under wind-gusts. Now only could be seen the whirlwind of her skirts flapping with the noise of a storm. When she came down, her arms extended, her chest thrown forward, she lowered her head a little, she glided for a second; then, a bound carried her away, and she leaned back, her head thrown backward, flying and entranced, her eyelids closed. It was her enjoyment, those ascents and those descents that made her giddy. Above, she entered into the sunlight, into that pale February sun, raining, as it were, a golden dust. Her chestnut hair, with amber glints, was lit up; and one would have said that she was all aflame, whilst her mauve silk bows, like *fleurs-de-feu*, shone on her gleaming dress. Around her, the spring was

coming, the violet-hued buds were showing their fine lac tone, against the azure of the sky.

Then, Jeanne joined her hands. Her mother appeared to her as a saint with a golden nimbus, that had taken flight for Paradise. And she lisped again :

“Oh! mamma, oh! mamma ——” in a broken voice.

Meanwhile, Madame Deberle and Malignon, interested, had advanced under the trees. Malignon considered that lady very courageous. Madame Deberle said in a frightened tone :

“My heart would turn, that is certain!”

Hélène heard, for she hurled these words from the midst of the branches :

“Oh! as for me, my heart is strong! Go on, go on, then, Monsieur Rambaud.”

And, indeed, her voice was calm. She seemed not to care for the two men who were there. They were not considered, no doubt. Her tresses had become disheveled; the cord must have become untied, and her skirts rustled like a pennant. She ascended.

But all of a sudden she exclaimed:

"Enough, Monsieur Rambaud, enough!"

Doctor Deberle had just appeared on the high steps. He approached, tenderly embraced his wife, picked up Lucien and kissed him on the forehead. Then, smiling, he looked at Hélène.

"Enough, enough!" the latter continued to say.

"Why, then?" he asked. "Do I interfere with you?"

She did not answer. She had become serious.

The swing, hurled at full length, did not stop; it kept up long regular oscillations that still carried Hélène very high. And the doctor, surprised and delighted, was admiring her, so superb, tall and strong was she, in all the purity of an antique statue, thus gracefully balanced in the springtide sun. But she appeared irritated, and, suddenly, she jumped.

"Wait! wait!" everybody exclaimed.

Hélène moaned faintly. She had fallen on the gravel of an alley, and she was unable to rise again.

"*Mon Dieu!* how imprudent!" said the doctor, his face very pale.

All crowded around her. Jeanne was weeping so bitterly that Monsieur Rambaud, himself ready to swoon, had to take her in his arms. The doctor, however, eagerly questioned Hélène.

"It is the right limb that has suffered, is it not? — You cannot stand up?"

And as she remained stunned, without answering, he asked again:

"You are suffering?"

"A dull pain there, in the knee," she said, evidently in pain.

Then he sent his wife for his medicine-case and bandages. He repeated:

"I must see, I must see — It is nothing, no doubt."

Then he knelt on the gravel. Hélène acquiesced thus far. But, when he advanced his hands, she rose with an effort and gathered her skirts around her feet.

"No, no," she murmured.

"Nevertheless," he said, "it is very necessary to examine —"

She trembled slightly, and, in a low voice, she continued:

"I do not wish — It is nothing."

He looked at her, at first astonished. A rosy tint had mounted to her neck. For an instant their eyes met and seemed to read the depths of each other's soul. Then, becoming agitated, he slowly rose and remained near her without again asking to visit her.

Hélène had called Monsieur Rambaud with a sign. She whispered to him:

"Go for Doctor Bodin, tell him what has happened to me."

Ten minutes later, when Doctor Bodin arrived, she stood up with superhuman courage, and leaning on him and on Monsieur Rambaud, she went up to her own dwelling. Jeanne followed her, sobbing convulsively.

"I shall wait for you," Doctor Deberle had said to his confrère. "Come and reassure us."

In the garden, they chatted briskly. Malignon exclaimed that women entertained strange ideas. Why the devil had that lady amused herself by swinging? Pauline, much put out by the adventure that deprived her of a pleasure, considered

it imprudent to swing so violently. The doctor did not speak, he seemed anxious.

"Nothing serious," said Doctor Bodin on coming down, "a mere sprain —— But she will remain on her reclining chair at least a fortnight."

Monsieur Deberle then in a friendly way tapped Malignon on the shoulder. He wanted his wife to go into the house, because it was decidedly too cool. And, taking Lucien, he carried him himself, covering him with kisses.

V

Both windows of the room were wide open, and Paris unfolded its immense level in the abyss that hollowed itself at the foot of the house, built perpendicularly on the hill. Ten o'clock struck, the fine February morning had the mildness and odor of spring.

Hélène, stretched out on her long chair, her knee still swathed in bandages, was reading at one of the windows. She no longer suffered; but, for a week past she had been anchored there, not being able even to work at her customary sewing. Not knowing what to do, she who never read had opened a book that was lying on the table. It was the book which she used every evening to shade the night-lamp, the only one that in eighteen months she had taken out of her little library, furnished by Monsieur Rambaud

with wholesome works. Ordinarily, romances seemed to her false and puerile. The one in question, Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, had at first tired her very much. Then she was seized with a singular curiosity. She finished it, at times affected, overcome with weariness, she let it fall from her hands during long minutes, her looks fixed on the vast horizon.

That morning, Paris seemed to awaken with a smiling slothfulness. A vapor that followed the valley of the Seine, had bathed both banks. It was a light mist, milky, as it were, which the gradually increasing sun lit up. One distinguished nothing of the city under that floating muslin, the color of the season. In the hollows, the denser cloud was sinking with a bluish tint, whilst, on broad spaces, transparencies were formed, of an extreme fineness, a gilded dust through which one recognizes the openings of the streets; and, higher up, domes and spires rent the fog, thrusting upwards gray outlines, still enveloped in the shreds of the mist which they were piercing. At moments, flakes of yellow smoke broke away,

moving like the heavy wings of a giant bird, then they melted in the air, which seemed to drink them. And above that immensity, that cloud that had come down and was sleeping over Paris, a very clear sky, of a faint blue, almost white, displayed its deep vault. The sun rose in a shower of dust softened with its rays. A soft yellow light—the vague blond of childhood—burst forth in showers and filled space with its tepid shivering. It was a feast, a sovereign peace, and the tender mirth of the infinite, whilst the city, riddled with golden spires, lazy and drowsy, was undetermined whether to show itself under its laces.

Hélène, for a week past, had that enjoyment of the great Paris spread out before her. Never did she tire of it. It was unfathomable and changing as an ocean, pure in the morning and aflame in the evening, taking on the joys and the sorrows of the heavens that it reflected. A burst of sunshine made golden waves roll over it, a cloud shadowed it and raised storms within it. It was ever renewing itself: there were dull calms with their orange color, wind-gusts that from

hour to hour leadened the expanse, keen and clear weather kindling a gleam on the crest of each roof, downpours drowning sky and land, effacing the horizon like the break-up of a chaos. Hélène there enjoyed all the melancholies and all the hopes of the ocean; she even believed she received its strong air, its bitter scent in her face; and there was nothing, even to the continuous rumbling of the city, that did not bring to her the illusion of the rising tide, beating against the rocks of a cliff.

The book slipped from her hands. She was dreaming, her eyes wandering. When she thus let it go, it was from the necessity of pausing, of understanding and waiting. She derived enjoyment from not satisfying her curiosity all at once. The story swelled her with an emotion that was stifling her. Paris, on that morning, had exactly the joy and the vague trouble that her heart felt. There was a great charm in being ignorant, half divining, giving herself up to a slow initiation, with the dim idea that she was beginning her youth over again.

How those romances lied! She had reason truly never to read any of them. They were fables fit for empty heads, that have not a true idea of life. And yet she continued to be interested, she was dreaming perforce of the knight Ivanhoe, so passionately loved by two women, Rebecca, the pretty Jewess, and the noble lady, Rowena. It seemed to her that she would have loved with the pride and patient serenity of the latter. To love, to love! and that word, which, although she did not pronounce it, was of itself vibrating in her, astonished her and made her smile. Afar off, pale clouds, like a flock of swans, were floating over Paris, carried along by a breeze. Large sheets of fog were being displaced; for an instant, the left bank appeared, trembling and veiled, like a fairy city seen in a dream; but a mass of vapor was dissolving, and that city was engulfed as with an inundation. Now, the mist, spread equally over all quarters, was rounding out a beautiful lake with clear and still water. A thicker current marked with a gray curve the course of the Seine. Slowly, on those white waters, so calm, shadows

seemed to make rosy-sailed vessels cruise, whose course the young woman followed with a dreamy look. To love, to love! and she smiled at her floating dream.

Meantime, Hélène took up her book again. She was at that episode of the attack on the castle, when Rebecca is nursing the wounded Ivanhoe and is informing him of the battle, which she is following from a window.

She thought herself in a beautiful dream, she was walking in it as in an ideal garden, with golden fruits, where she tasted every illusion. Then, at the end of the scene, when Rebecca, enveloped in her veil, breathes out all her tenderness over the sleeping knight, Hélène once more let the volume fall, her heart so swollen with emotion that she could not continue.

Mon Dieu! were all those things true? And, thrown back in her reclining chair, torpid from the quiet that it was necessary for her to observe, she was contemplating Paris, under the pale sun, bathed and mysterious. Then, invoked by the pages of the romance, her own life stood before

Part First Chapter XV

Then he knelt on the gravel. Hélène acquiesced thus far. But, when he advanced his hands, she rose with an effort and gathered her skirts around her feet.

"No, no," she murmured.

"Nevertheless," he said, "it is very necessary to examine ——"



her. She saw herself a young girl at Marseilles, in the house of her father, the hatter Mouret. The Rue des Petites-Maries was dark, and the house, with its vat of boiling water for the manufacture of hats, exhaled, even in fine weather, a stale odor of humidity. She also saw her mother, still ailing, who was kissing her with her pale lips, without speaking. Never had she seen a ray of sunshine in the room of her childhood. They worked continually around her, they were laboriously earning a laborer's comfort. Then, that was all: until her marriage, nothing varied the monotony of those succeeding days. One morning, as she was returning from market with her mother, she had jostled against the young Grandjean with her basket full of vegetables. Charles had turned around, and had followed them. The whole romance of her love consisted in that. During three months, she incessantly met him, he was humble and awkward, not daring to approach her. She was sixteen, and was a little proud of that lover whom she knew to be of a rich family. But she found him ugly, she laughed at him

often, and slept peacefully in the shadow of the big damp house. Then they had married. That marriage still astonished her. Charles adored her, cast himself on the floor at nights when she was going to bed, to kiss her bare feet. She smiled, full of tenderness, in reproaching him for being so childish. Then a colorless life had begun again. For twelve years, she did not remember a single shock. She was very calm and very happy, without a fever of the flesh or of the heart, buried in the daily cares of a poor household. Charles still kissed her marble-like feet, whilst she showed herself kind and motherly to him. Nothing more. And she suddenly saw the room in the Hôtel du Var, her husband dead, her widow's weeds spread out on a chair. She had wept as on the winter evening when her mother died. Then, the days had flown again. For two months past, with her daughter, she felt herself once more very happy and very calm. *Mon Dieu!* was that all? and what, then, did that book say, when it spoke of those great loves that light up a whole life?

Along the horizon, over the dormant lake, long tremblings coursed. Then the lake, all of a sudden, seemed to divide; clefts were formed, and there was, from one end to the other, a noise as of the breaking up of ice. The sun, higher, in the triumphant glory of its rays, victoriously attacked the fog. Gradually, the great lake seemed to dry up, as if some invisible overflow had emptied the plain.

The vapors, so dense a little while ago, became thin, transparent, taking on the gorgeous colors of the rainbow.

The whole left bank was of a soft blue, gradually deepening, violet-hued at the bottom, on the side of the Jardin des Plantes.

On the right bank, the Tuileries quarter had the pale rose hue of a flesh-colored tissue, whilst, towards Montmartre, it was like a gleam of live coal, of carmine flaming with gold; then, very far off, the workingmen's faubourgs were darkened with a brick tinge, ever fainter and fainter and passing to the bluish gray of slate.

One did not yet distinguish the trembling and fleeting city, like one of those submarine deeps

that the eye guesses at through clear water, with their terrifying forests of tall grasses, their rumblings full of horror, their monsters, of which one catches only glimpses.

Meanwhile the waters were still lowering. They were now only like fine muslins spread out; and, one by one, the muslins were disappearing, the image of Paris was making itself more distinct and was emerging from the dream.

To love, to love! why did that thought come back again to her with that sweetness, whilst she followed the dissolving fog? Had she not loved her husband, whom she cared for as for a child? But a poignant recollection was awakened, that of her father, whom they had found hanged three weeks after his wife's death, at the back of a closet in which her garments were still hanging. He suffered his agony there, stiffened, his face buried in a petticoat, enveloped in those garments which exhaled a little of her whom he still adored.

Then, in her reverie, there was a sudden start; she was thinking of household details, of the

monthly accounts that she had settled that very morning with Rosalie, and she felt very proud of her good order.

She had lived over thirty years in absolute dignity and firmness.

Justice alone inspired her.

When she interrogated her past, she did not find an hour's weakness, she saw herself with a firm step following a level and perfectly straight path. Certainly time might roll on, she would continue her tranquil course without her foot encountering an obstacle. And that made her severe, and filled her with wrath and contempt for those lying lives whose heroism troubles hearts. The only true life was hers, which unfolded itself in undisturbed peace.

But, over Paris, there was but a thin smoke now, a mere gauze trembling and almost ready to vanish; and a sudden tenderness stole over her.

To love, to love! everything brought her back to the sweetness of that expression, even her pride in her virtue. Her reverie became so airy

that she no longer thought, but, lost in the glories of spring, her eyes were moist.

However, Hélène was about to take up her book again, when Paris slowly appeared. Not a gust of wind had passed, it appeared as if by magic. The last film detached itself, ascended, vanished in the air. And the city spread itself out without a shadow, under the conquering sun.

Hélène remained with her chin resting on her hand, looking at that colossal awakening.

An unending valley of heaped-up buildings. On the lost line of the hillsides, masses of roofs were detached, whilst one saw the wave of the houses rolling afar off, behind the curves of the land, mid rural scenes shut out from view. It was the open sea, with the infinite and the unknown of its waves.

Paris was spread out, as large as the heavens.

Under that morning radiance, the city in the yellow sunlight seemed a field of ripe ears; and the immense tableau was not marred by confusion, two shades appeared, only the pale blue of the air and the gilded reflection of the roofs.

The shower of those spring rays gave a fresh charm to objects. One clearly distinguished the smallest details, so pure was the light. Paris, with the inextricable chaos of its stones, shone as if under a crystal. From time to time, however, in that brilliant and motionless serenity, a breath passed; and then one saw quarters whose lines softened and fluttered as if one had looked at them through some invisible flame.

Hélène, at first, was interested in the broad expanse unrolled beneath her windows, in the slope of the Trocadéro and in the development of the quays. It was necessary for her to stoop, in order to perceive the bare square of the Champ-de-Mars, closed at the farther end by the dark barrier of the *École Militaire*. Below, on the vast space and on the sidewalks, on both sides of the Seine, she distinguished the passers-by, an active multitude of black points, moving along like so many ants; the yellow box of an omnibus flashed like a spark: trucks and hacks were crossing the bridge, appearing as small as a child's toy, with tiny horses that resembled pieces of mechanism;

and, along the grass-covered slopes, among other promenaders, a servant-girl in a white apron formed a clear patch on the grass. Then Hélène raised her eyes; but the multitude broke into fragments and was lost, the carriages themselves became grains of sand; there was nothing more than the gigantic carcass of the city, as if empty and deserted, living only by the dull trepidation that was agitating it. There, in front, to the left, red roofs shone, the tall chimneys of the Manutention were smoking lazily; while, on the other side of the river, between the Esplanade and the Champ-de-Mars, a clump of large elms formed a corner of a park, of which one saw clearly the bare branches and the rounded tops, already tinted with green buds. In the middle, the Seine was spreading, triumphant, encased in its gray banks, to which unloaded casks, profiles of steam cranes, dirt-carts drawn up in line, gave the appearance of a seaport. Hélène was always returning to that resplendent sheet of water on which barks were passing, like ink-colored birds. Perforce, with a far-away look, she ascended its

superb stream. It was, as it were, a silver thread that cut Paris in two. That morning, the water rolled in the sunlight, the horizon had no more brilliant light. And the young woman's look at first rested on the Pont des Invalides, then on the Pont de la Concorde, then on the Pont Royal; the bridges continued, seemed to get closer together, to be placed one above another, building strange viaducts of several stories, pierced with arches of all shapes; whilst the river, between those light structures, showed the edges of its blue robe increasingly indistinct and narrow. She again raised her eyes: down there, the stream was divided by the irregular massing of the houses; the bridges, on both sides of the Cité, became threads spread from one bank to the other; and the towers of Notre-Dame, all gilded, arose like horizon landmarks, beyond which the river, the buildings, the clumps of trees merged into the sun's dust. Then, dazzled, she left that triumphal heart of Paris, where all the glory of the city appeared to flare. On the right bank, in the midst of the old trees of the

Champs-Élysées, the large glass roofs of the Palais de l'Industrie shone with the whiteness of snow; farther on, behind the squat roof of the Madeleine, like a tombstone, arose the enormous mass of the Opéra; and there were other buildings, other cupolas and towers, the Vendôme column, the Saint-Vincent de Paul church, the Saint-Jacques tower, and, nearer, the heavy squares of the pavilions of the new Louvre and of the Tuileries, half-hidden in a clump of chestnut-trees. On the left bank, the gilding of the dome of the Invalides rippled; beyond, the two unequal towers of Saint-Sulpice paled in the light; and, still farther away, to the right of the new spires of Sainte-Clotilde, the bluish Panthéon, seated squarely on a height, dominated the city, displayed its fine colonnade standing out in clear relief, motionless in the air and with the silky appearance of a captive balloon.

Now Hélène, with an indolent glance, took in all Paris.

Valleys were dug there, which one guessed at by the positions of the roofs; the Butte des

Moulins stood up in a trembling wave of old slates, whilst the line of the great boulevards descended like a brook, in which was swallowed up an irregular mass of houses, whose roofs even one no longer saw.

At that morning hour, the oblique sun did not light up the fronts turned towards the Trocadéro. No window was lighted. Only the glass on the roofs scintillated like bright sparks of mica, against the baked red of the surrounding potteries.

The houses remained gray, a gray warmed by reflections; but flashes of light pierced the quarters, the long, sunken streets, right in front of Hélène, and cut the shadow with their sun-rays.

To the left only, the Buttes Montmartre and the Père-la-Chaise heights broke the flat horizon, rounded without a break.

The details so clear in the foreground, the innumerable indentings of the chimneys, the small black etchings of the thousands of windows, were effaced, tinged with yellow and blue, confounded in the pell-mell of an endless city, of

which the distant suburbs seemed to prolong the sea of shingles, bathed in a violet-hued mist, under the broad and changing light of the sky.

Hélène, quite grave, was contemplating, when Jeanne entered joyously.

“Mamma, mamma, just see!”

The child was holding a big bunch of yellow gillyflowers. And she told, with laughter, that she had watched Rosalie return with the provisions, so as to inspect her basket. It was her delight, to explore that basket.

“See, then, mamma! there was that at the bottom —, just smell the sweet odor!”

The wild flowers, striped with purple, exhaled a penetrating scent, that embalmed the whole room. Then, Hélène, with a passionate impulse, drew Jeanne to her breast, while the bunch of gillyflowers fell on her knees.

To love, to love! certainly she loved her child. Was that not enough, that great love which had filled her life until then?

That love ought to be sufficient for her, with its sweetness and its calm, its eternity which no

lassitude could break. And she pressed her daughter closer, as if to remove the thoughts that threatened to separate her from her.

Meanwhile, Jeanne gave herself up to that deluge of kisses. Her eyes moist, she nestled on her mother's shoulder, with a caressing motion of her delicate neck. Then she passed her arm around her waist, she clung there, quite quiet, her cheek resting on her bosom. Between them were the gillyflowers exhaling their perfume.

For a long time they did not speak. Jeanne, without stirring, at last asked in a low voice :

"Mamma, you see, down there, near the river, that dome that is always red — What is it, then?"

It was the dome of the Institute. Hélène, for an instant, looked, seeming to reflect. And, sweetly :

"I do not know, my child."

The little one was satisfied with this answer, and the silence was resumed.

But she soon put another question.

"And there, quite near, those fine trees?" she continued, pointing with her finger to a stretch of the Tuileries garden.

"Those fine trees?" the mother murmured. "To the left, you mean? — I do not know, my child."

"Ah!" said Jeanne.

Then, after a brief reverie, she added with a grave, pouting expression:

"We know nothing."

They knew nothing of Paris, in fact.

For eighteen months they had it under their eyes at every hour, yet they did not know a stone of it.

Three times only, they had gone down into the city; but having gone up again to their own quarters, with a headache from such agitation, they had learned nothing, in the midst of the enormous pell-mell of the quarters.

Jeanne, however, was sometimes persistent.

"Ah! you are going to tell me!" she said. "That glass all white? — It is very big, you ought to know."

She was pointing to the Palais de l'Industrie. Hélène hesitated.

"It is a railway station — No, I think that it is a theatre —"

She smiled, she kissed Jeanne's hair, repeating her habitual answer:

"I do not know, my child."

Then they continued to look at Paris, without further seeking to recognize it. It was very pleasant to have it there and yet be unfamiliar with it. It remained the infinite and the unknown. It was as if they had stopped at the threshold of a world of which they had an eternal view, refusing to go down into it. Often, Paris disturbed them, when it sent them its warm and heavy exhalations. But that morning it had a childish gayety and innocence, its mystery breathed only tenderness on their faces.

Hélène resumed her book, while Jeanne, pressed against her, continued looking. In the bright and motionless sky, no breeze arose. The smoke of the Manutention mounted straight up, in light clouds that were lost at a great height. And,

on a level with the houses, waves passed over the city, a stirring of life, made up of all the life it contained. The loud murmur of the streets seemed to have a subdued cheerfulness in the warm sunlight.

But a noise attracted Jeanne's attention. It was a flight of white pigeons that had left some neighboring dovecote, and was passing through the air, in front of the window; they covered the horizon, their snow-white wings concealed the immensity of Paris.

Hélène again raised her eyes and was wandering, absorbed in thought. She was the lady Rowena, she loved peacefully and deeply with a noble soul.

That spring morning, that great city so sweet, those first gillyflowers that perfumed her knees, had gradually melted her heart.

PART SECOND

I

One morning, H       was occupied in arranging her little library, the books of which she had been upsetting for some days past, when Jeanne entered, bounding, clapping her hands.

“Mamma,” she exclaimed, “a soldier! a soldier!”

“What? — a soldier? —” said the young woman. “What do you mean by your soldier?”

But the child had one of her fits of joyous folly; she bounded more wildly, and repeated: “A soldier! a soldier!” without explaining herself further. Then, as she had left the door open, H       arose, and she was quite surprised to see a little soldier in the hall.

Rosalie had gone out; Jeanne must have been playing on the landing, in spite of her mother’s formal prohibition.

"What do you wish, my friend?" Hélène asked.

The little soldier, quite upset by that lady's appearance, so pretty and so white as she was in her lace-trimmed dressing-gown, scraped one foot on the floor, saluted, and stammered hurriedly:

"Pardon — Excuse —"

He found nothing else to say, and drew back to the wall, still scuffling his feet. Not being able to go any farther, seeing that the lady was waiting with an involuntary smile, he fumbled excitedly in his right-hand pocket, from which he drew a blue handkerchief, a knife, and a piece of bread. He looked at each article, and plunged it back again. Then he passed to the left-hand pocket; in that were a piece of string, two rusty nails, and images wrapped up in half of a newspaper. He rammed everything back again, and slapped his thighs with an anxious look. Then he stammered, amazed:

"Pardon — Excuse —"

Suddenly, he laid a finger against his nose, bursting out into a hearty laugh. The imbecile!

he remembered. He opened two buttons of his top-coat, fumbled in his breast, plunging in his arm up to the elbow. At last, he brought out a letter that he shook violently, as if to remove the dust from it, before handing it to Hélène.

"A letter for me, you are sure?" said the latter.

The envelope indeed bore her name and address, in a peasant's rude handwriting, with strokes that jostled one another like knaves of cards. And as soon as she had succeeded in understanding, stopped at each line by extraordinary expressions and orthography, she smiled afresh. It was a letter from Rosalie's aunt, who sent Zéphyrin Lacour to her, drawn by lot "in spite of two Masses said by the pastor." Then, as Zéphyrin was Rosalie's lover, she begged the lady to allow the young people to see each other on Sundays. There were three pages on which this request recurred in the same terms, but increasingly mixed up, with a constant effort to say something that was not said. Then, before signing, the aunt seemed to have got a sudden

inspiration, and she had written: "The pastor permits it," crushing her pen mid a sputtering of ink-blots.

Hélène slowly folded the letter. While deciphering it, she had two or three times raised her head, to cast a glance at the soldier. He was still fixed against the wall, and his lips were moving, he seemed to support each phrase with a slight motion of the chin; no doubt he knew the letter by heart.

"Then you are Zéphyrin Lacour?" she said.

He burst out laughing, and his neck shook.

"Come in, my friend, do not stay there."

He decided to follow her, but he remained standing near the door, while Hélène sat down. She had had but an imperfect view of him, in the dim light of the hall. He must have been exactly Rosalie's height: half an inch shorter and he would have been disqualified. With red hair, cut very close, without a sprout of beard, he had a very round face, covered with freckles, pierced by two eyes as small as gimlet-holes. His new top-coat, very large for him, made him look still more round;

and with his bandy legs in his red trousers, whilst he balanced in front of him his broad-peaked cap, he was ludicrous and amusing, with his grotesque rotundity, like a stupid little simpleton, feeling burdened under his uniform.

Hélène wanted to interrogate him, to get some information.

"You left Beauce a week ago?"

"Yes, madame."

"And here you are at Paris. You are not sorry for it?"

"No, madame."

He became emboldened, he looked around the room, very much impressed by the blue velvet hangings.

"Rosalie is not here," continued Hélène; "but she will soon return — Her aunt tells me that you are her lover."

The little soldier did not reply; he drooped his head, laughing with an awkward air, and commenced to rub the carpet with the toe of his boot.

"Then you are going to marry her, when you leave the service?" the young woman continued.

"Most certainly," he said, as he became very red, "most certainly, it is sworn ——"

And won by the lady's kindly air, twirling his cap between his fingers, he made up his mind to speak.

"Oh! there is plenty of time —— When we were quite little, we went marauding together. We were neatly switched; for that, it is quite true —— I ought to tell you that the Lacours and the Pichons dwelt close together, side by side. Then, don't you see? Rosalie and I were brought up, as it were, on the same porringer —— Since then everybody belonging to her is dead —— Her aunt Marguerite gave her soup —— But she, the old hound, always had thundering arms ——"

He stopped, feeling that he was getting excited, and he asked in a hesitating voice:

"Perhaps she has told you all that?"

"Yes, but go on," replied Hélène, whom he was amusing.

"In fact," he continued, "she was mightily strong, though no stouter than a skylark; she

dispatched matters, you ought to see her! Well, one day, she gave some one of my acquaintance a rap, oh! such a rap! I had my arm black from it for a whole week — Yes, it happened like that. In the country, everybody was having us married to each other. Then, we were not ten years old when we were hand in glove with each other — And that sticks, madame, that sticks! —”

He laid his hand on his heart, with his fingers outspread. Hélène, however, had become grave again. That idea of introducing a soldier into her kitchen disturbed her. It was all very well for the pastor to permit it, she thought it rather risky. In the rural districts, people are very free, lovers go as they please. She showed her fears. When Zéphyrin understood, he thought he would split his sides with laughing; but he restrained himself, out of respect.

“Oh! madame, oh! madame! — It is clearly to be seen that you do not know her. I have received them, the blows! — My God! the boys, they like to laugh, don't you think? I

pinched her several times. Then she turned round, and, presto! straight in the nose — It was her aunt that repeated to her: ‘See you, my girl, don’t let any one tickle you, that runs no chance.’ The pastor also interfered, and it was perhaps indeed on that account that our friendship has always held — They were to have us married after the drafting. Then, deuce take it! things turned out badly. Rosalie said that she would go out to service in Paris in order to amass a dowry while waiting for me. And that’s it, that’s how it stands —”

He acted like a ninny, passed his cap from one hand to the other. But, as H  l  ne kept silent, he thought he understood that she was doubting his fidelity. That hurt him a great deal. He exclaimed with warmth:

“You think perhaps that I will deceive her? And I tell you that it is sworn! I will marry her, do you see, as true as the day is shining on us — And I am quite ready to sign that for you — Yes, if you wish, I am going to sign a paper for you —”

A strong emotion was stirring him. He was walking through the room looking for a pen and ink. Hélène earnestly tried to calm him. He repeated :

"I would prefer to sign a paper for you —— What would that do for you? you would indeed be quite at ease then."

But, just at that moment, Jeanne, who had disappeared anew, returned dancing and clapping her hands.

"Rosalie! Rosalie! Rosalie! ——" she was singing to a merry air that she was composing.

Through the open doors they plainly heard the panting of the housemaid who was coming up, loaded with her basket. Zéphyrin drew back into a corner of the room; a silent laugh stretched his mouth from ear to ear, and his gimlet-hole eyes shone with peasant malice. Rosalie came direct into the room, as had been her familiar habit, to show the morning's provisions to her mistress.

"Madame," she said, "I have bought cauliflower —— See, then! —— Two for eighteen sous, that is not dear ——"

She was reaching out her half-open basket when, on raising her head, she noticed Zéphyrin, who was tittering. Amazement pinned her to the carpet. Two or three seconds elapsed, no doubt she had not recognized him at once in his uniform. His round eyes became enlarged, his small, fat face became pale, whilst her stiff black locks trembled.

“Oh!” was all she said.

And from surprise she let her basket fall. The provisions rolled on the carpet, cauliflowers, onions, apples. Jeanne, delighted, uttered an exclamation and threw herself on the floor, in the middle of the room, running after the apples, even under the arm-chairs and the mirrored wardrobe. Yet Rosalie, still paralyzed, did not move, but repeated :

“What! it is you! — What are you doing here? tell me! what are you doing here?”

She turned towards Hélène and asked :

“It is you, then, who have let him in?”

Zéphyrin did not speak, he was satisfied with winking his eyes in a mischievous way. Then,

tears of tenderness came into Rosalie's eyes, and, to show her joy at seeing him again, she could do nothing better than to poke fun at him.

"Ah! there," she continued as she approached him, "you're pretty, you're neat, in that suit! — I might have passed you by, I should not have said even: God bless you! — Look how you're got up! You look as if you had your sentry-box on your back. And they have shaved your head neatly, you resemble the sacristan's poodle — My goodness! how ugly you are, how ugly you are!"

Zéphyrin, distressed, decided to open his mouth.

"It is not my fault, certainly — If they sent you to the regiment, we should see something."

They had completely forgotten where they were, the room, Hélène, and Jeanne who continued to pick up the apples. The housemaid had planted herself erect in front of the little soldier, her hands clasped on her apron.

"Then everything goes all right down there?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed, except that the Guignards' cow is sick. The doctor came and told them that she was full of water."

"If she is full of water, she is done for — Except that, everything goes well? —"

"Yes, yes — The rural guard broke his arm — Old Canivet is dead — The pastor, while returning from Grandval, lost his purse, in which there were thirty sous. Otherwise, everything goes well."

And they were silent. They were looking at each other with glistening eyes, their lips compressed and moving slowly with a tender grimace. That must have been their way of embracing each other, for they had not even extended their hands. But Rosalie suddenly finished her contemplation, and she was distracted on seeing her vegetables on the floor. A fine mess! he made her do very pretty things! Madame should have let him wait on the stairway. While scolding, she stooped, picked up the apples, onions, cauliflowers, and put them again in the basket, to the great disappointment of Jeanne, who did not wish

any one to help her. And as she was going away to the kitchen, without looking any more at Zéphyrin, Hélène, won over by the peaceful, healthy quiet of the two lovers, kept her back to say to her:

"Listen, my girl, your aunt has asked me to authorize this young man to come to see you every Sunday — He will come in the afternoon, and you will try not to let your service suffer too much from it."

Rosalie stopped, simply turned her head. She was quite satisfied, but she continued to grumble.

"Oh! madame, he is going to upset me finely!" she exclaimed.

And she cast a look at Zéphyrin over her shoulder and again made a tender grimace at him. The little soldier remained motionless for a moment, his mouth parted in mute laughter. Then, he withdrew backwards, uttering his thanks, while placing his hat against his heart. The door was closed while he was yet saluting on the landing.

"Mamma, is it Rosalie's brother?" Jeanne asked.

Hélène was quite embarrassed at this question. She regretted the permission that she had just granted under a sudden impulse of kindness, at which she was astonished. She thought for a few seconds, then she answered:

"No, he is her cousin."

"Ah!" said the child, gravely.

Rosalie's kitchen looked out on Doctor Deberle's garden, exposed to the sun. In summer, the branches of the elms entered through the large window. It was the brightest room of the tenement, flooded with light, so well lighted even that Rosalie had to hang up a blue cotton curtain, which she drew in the afternoon. She complained only of the smallness of the kitchen, which stretched out like a pipe, the range on the right, a table and a dresser on the left. But she had so well arranged the utensils and the furniture that she had economized, near the window, a free corner in which she worked in the evening. Her pride was to keep the saucepans, the kettles, and the dishes marvelously clean. And so, when the sunshine entered, the walls radiated a brilliant

light; the copperware shot out golden sparks, the rounded surfaces of the wrought-iron utensils shone like silver moons; whilst the blue and white tiles of the range added their pale tints to that conflagration.

The following Saturday, in the evening, Hélène heard a hurly-burly which she made up her mind to go and investigate.

"What is it, then?" she asked. "Are you fighting with the furniture? ——"

"I am washing, madame," replied Rosalie, in a flutter and perspiring, crouched on the floor, in the act of rubbing the hearth-stone with all the strength of her little arms.

It was finished, she sponged it. Never had she made her kitchen so beautiful. A bride might have slept there, everything in it was as white as if for a wedding. The table and the dresser seemed as if newly polished, so vigorously had she used her fingers on them. And one should have seen the perfect order, the saucepans and the pots in rows according to size, each article on its nail, even to the frying-pan

and the griddle, which shone without a mark of smoke. Hélène remained there for an instant, silent; then she smiled and withdrew.

Then, every Saturday, there was a similar cleaning, four hours spent in dust and in water. Rosalie wanted, on Sunday, to show her cleanliness to Zéphyrin. She received on that day. A cobweb would have made her feel ashamed. When everything shone around her, she became pleasant and sang. At three o'clock she again washed her hands and put on a cap with ribbons. Then, half-drawing the cotton curtain, letting in a subdued light, she waited for Zéphyrin in the midst of her orderly surroundings in an odor sweet with thyme and laurel.

At half-past three precisely, Zéphyrin arrived; he paraded in the street, until the half-hour had sounded from the clocks of the quarter. Rosalie was listening to his big shoes bumping against the steps, and opened the door for him when he stopped on the landing, for she had forbidden him to touch the bell-cord. Each time, they exchanged the same words.

"It is you?"

"Yes, it is I."

And they remained nose to nose, with their eyes twinkling and their mouths puckered. Then Zéphyrin followed Rosalie; but she kept him from entering until she had relieved him of his cap and his sword. She did not want anything like that in her kitchen, she concealed the sabre and the shako in the recesses of a wall-press. Then she seated her lover near the window, in the corner provided there, and she did not allow him to move again.

"Keep quiet — You may look at me getting the lady's dinner ready, if you wish."

But he scarcely ever came with his hands empty. Ordinarily, he had spent the morning rambling with comrades around the Meudon woods, dragging his feet in endless strollings, lazy, and drinking in the open air, with vague regrets for the country. To occupy his fingers, he cut twigs, trimmed them, embellished them while walking, with all sorts of arabesques; his step became still slower, he stopped near the

trenches, his shako on the back of his head, his eyes continually following his knife with which he was whittling the wood. Then, as he could not make up his mind to throw away his twigs, he carried them in the afternoon to Rosalie, who took them out of his hands, crying out because they littered the kitchen. The truth was that she was making a collection of them; she had under her bed a bunch of them of all lengths and shapes.

One day, he arrived with a nest full of eggs, which he had placed in the crown of his shako, under his handkerchief. Omelets made with birds' eggs were very good, he said. Rosalie threw away the horrid things, but she kept the nest, which was destined to join the twigs. Then, too, he always had his pockets full to bursting. He took from them curiosities, transparent pebbles, picked up on the bank of the Seine, old horse-shoes from the unfrequented bays that had dried up, despised remains that the rag-pickers had not wanted. His special passion was pictures. Along the roads, he picked up paper that had been

wrapped around chocolate or soap, and on which were seen negroes and palm-trees, eastern dancing women and bouquets of roses. The lids of old empty boxes, with blonde and dreamy ladies, varnished engravings, and the silver paper of sugar-plums, thrown away at the fairs in the environs, were the great finds which swelled his heart. All that booty disappeared in his pockets; he wrapped the choicest articles in a piece of newspaper. And on Sunday, when Rosalie had a moment to spare, between a sauce and a roast, he showed her his pictures. They were for her, if she liked; only, as the paper encircling them was not always clean, he cut out the pictures, and this greatly amused him. Rosalie was angry, for the bits of paper settled around, even on her dishes; and one should have seen with what peasant malice, from old habit, he at last took hold of her scissors. Sometimes, to get rid of him, she abruptly gave them to him.

Meanwhile, some brown butter-sauce sizzled in a saucepan. Rosalie was watching the sauce, a wooden spoon in her hand, while Zéphyrin, his

head bent, his back broadened by his red epaulettes, was cutting out pictures. His hair was cut so close that one saw his scalp; and his yellow collar gaped at the back, showing his tanned neck. For a quarter of an hour at a time, both said nothing. When Zéphyrin raised his head, he looked at Rosalie taking flour, chopping parsley, salting, peppering, with a deeply interested air. Then, at long intervals, a word escaped him.

“By golly! that smells too good!”

The cook, in the hurry of her preparations, did not deign to answer at once. After a long silence, she said in her turn:

“Do you see, that has to simmer.”

And their conversations hardly went beyond that. They did not even speak then of the country. When a reminiscence occurred to them, they understood each other at a word and laughed internally all the afternoon. That sufficed for them. When Rosalie saw Zéphyrin to the door, they had both of them been well entertained.

“Come, be off! I am going to wait on the lady.”

She returned his shako and his sabre, pushed him in front of her, then waited on madame, with a smiling face; whilst he, his arms swinging, returned to the barracks, internally tickled by that sweet odor of thyme and laurel which he brought away with him.

In the beginning, Hélène thought she ought to watch them. She sometimes arrived unexpectedly to give an order. And she always found Zéphyrin in his corner, between the table and the window, near the sandstone basin, which forced him to draw in his legs. As soon as the lady appeared, he arose as if to present arms, and remained standing. If the lady spoke to him, he scarcely replied except by salutes and respectful gruntings. Gradually Hélène was reassured, on seeing that she never disturbed them and that their countenances wore the peaceful expression of patient lovers.

Even Rosalie seemed then much less of a rustic than Zéphyrin. She had already been some months in Paris, she had been sharpened up there, though she knew only three streets, the

Rue de Passy, the Rue Franklin, and the Rue Vineuse. He, in the regiment, remained mawkish. She assured the lady that he was getting stupid; for in the country, sure enough, he was more mischievous. That was due to the uniform, she said; all the boys who fell under the conscription became densely stupid. In fact, Zéphyrin, dumfounded by his new existence, had the round eyes and the waddling gait of a goose. In spite of his epaulettes, he preserved his peasant dullness, the barracks did not yet teach him either the fine language or the triumphant manners of the Parisian foot-soldier.

Ah! madame might be at ease! it was not he who would think of romping.

And so Rosalie showed herself maternal. She was lecturing Zéphyrin while attending to the spit, lavished on him good advice regarding the pitfalls that he had to avoid; and he obeyed, supporting each point with a vigorous nod of his head. Every Sunday, he had to swear to her that he had gone to Mass and that he had religiously said his morning and evening prayers.

She further exhorted him to cleanliness, gave him a brushing when he was leaving, fastened a button on his tunic, examined him from head to foot, looking to see that nothing was out of order. She was uneasy, also, about his health, and told him of remedies against all sorts of diseases. Zéphyrin, in acknowledgment of her attentions, offered to fill her fountain for her. For a long time she refused, fearing lest he would spill some water. But one day, he carried up the two buckets without letting a drop fall on the stairs, and, from that time on, it was he who, on Sundays, filled the fountain. He performed other services for her, attended to all the heavy jobs, went very often to buy butter at the fruiterer's, if she had forgotten to get some. He even did some kitchen-work. At first, he peeled the vegetables. Later on, she allowed him to chop. After six weeks, he did not touch the sauces, but he watched over them, the wooden spoon in his hand. Rosalie had given him assistance, and she burst out laughing sometimes, when she saw him with his red trousers and his yellow coat collar,

stationed in front of the range, a dish-clout on his arm, like a scullion.

One Sunday, Hélène betook herself to the kitchen. Her slippers deadened the noise of her steps; she remained on the threshold without the housemaid or the soldier having heard her. In his corner, Zéphyrin was at table in front of a cup of smoking broth. Rosalie, who had her back turned to the door, was cutting long slices of bread for him.

“Go on, eat, my little man!” she said. “You march too much, that is what makes you empty —— Here! have you enough? do you want more?”

And she brooded over him with a tender and restless look. He, round as a ball, was settled over his cup, swallowing a slice at each mouthful. His face, yellow from freckles, was getting red in the vapor that was bathing it. He murmured:

“Zounds! what juice! What, then, do you put in it?”

“Wait,” she continued, “if you like leeks ——”

But, on turning, she perceived her mistress. She uttered a faint cry. Both of them remained

petrified. Then Rosalie excused herself with a hurried flow of words.

"It is my share, madame, oh! quite true — I would not have taken the broth — See, on what I hold most sacred! I said to him: If you wish to have my share of broth, I am going to give it up to you — Come, speak, then, you! you know very well that is what happened —"

And uneasy on account of the silence that her mistress observed, she, believing her angry, continued in a broken voice:

"He was dying of hunger, madame; he had stolen a raw carrot from me — They feed them so badly! Then, imagine that he is going to the devil, along the river, I know not where — You would have said to me yourself, madame: 'Rosalie, give him a bowl of broth, then —'"

Then Hélène, in the presence of the little soldier who stopped with his mouth full, not daring to swallow it, could not remain severe. She answered gently:

"Well, my girl, when that boy is hungry, he must be invited to dinner, that is all — I give you permission."

She had just felt, in their presence, that tenderness which, once already, had made her forget her strictness. They were so happy in that kitchen! The cotton curtain, half-drawn, admitted the light of the setting sun. The coppers flamed on the back wall, brightening the half-light of the room with a red reflection. And there, in that golden shade, were both their little round faces, tranquil and clear as moons. Their love was so tranquil in its certainty, that they did not disarrange the exquisite order of the utensils. They bloomed in the sweet odors of the ovens, with appetites gratified and stomachs nourished.

"Say, mamma," Jeanne asked that evening, after long reflection, "Rosalie's cousin never embraces her, why is that?"

"And why do you want them to embrace?" Hélène answered: "They will embrace on their feast-day."

II

After the soup, on that Tuesday, Hélène listened, saying :

“What a deluge, do you hear? — My poor friends, you are going to be drenched this evening.”

“Oh! a few drops,” murmured the Abbé, whose old cassock was already damp at the shoulders.

“As for me, I have a good stretch,” said Monsieur Rambaud; “but I will return home on foot all the same; I like that — Besides, I have my umbrella.”

Jeanne was reflecting, looking seriously on her last spoonful of vermicelli. Then she spoke slowly:

“Rosalie said that you would not come, because of the bad weather — Mamma said that you would come — You are quite considerate, you always come.”

Everybody smiled around the table. Hélène nodded her head affectionately towards the two brothers. Outside, the downpour continued, with a dull rumbling, and sudden gusts of wind made the venetian blinds rattle. Winter seemed to have returned. Rosalie had carefully drawn the red rep curtains; the little dining-room, snugly closed, lighted by the steady gleam of the hanging lamp, giving out a white light, was, notwithstanding the raging of the hurricane without, calm under the influence of tender intimacy. On the mahogany sideboard, the porcelain reflected the steady light.

And, enjoying that peace, with all the table appointments, neat and attractive, of a bourgeois home before them, the four guests chatted leisurely, awaiting the housemaid's good pleasure.

"Ah! you were waiting, so much the worse!" Rosalie said familiarly on entering with a dish. "There is a fillet of sole with bread-crumbs for Monsieur Rambaud, and that requires to be served at the last moment."

Monsieur Rambaud affected to be a gourmand so as to amuse Jeanne and to give pleasure to

Rosalie, who was very proud of her talent as a cook. He turned toward her, asking :

"Let us see, what have you got to-day? —— You always bring surprises when I am not hungry."

"Oh!" she answered, "there are three dishes, as usual; no more —— After the fillet of sole, you are going to have a leg of mutton and Brussels sprouts —— That's true, nothing more."

But Monsieur Rambaud was looking at Jeanne out of the corner of his eye. The child was very much amused, suppressing her laughter and clasp- ing her hands, but shaking her head as if to say that the housemaid was lying. Then he clicked his tongue with an air of doubt, and Rosalie feigned to be angry.

"You do not believe me," she continued, "be- cause mademoiselle is in a laughing mood —— Well, trust in that, follow your appetite, and you will see if you are not compelled to sit down at table again, on reaching home."

When the housemaid had left the room, Jeanne, who was laughing more heartily, was itching to speak.

"You are too much of a gourmand," she began; "but I know, I have been to the kitchen."

She stopped short.

"Ah! no, he must not be told, isn't that so, mamma? — There is nothing, nothing at all. It was to trap you that I was laughing."

This scene was renewed every Tuesday, and with the same success. Hélène was touched by the good grace with which Monsieur Rambaud played his part in that comedy, for she knew that for a long time he had lived with Provençal frugality, on an anchovy and half a dozen olives a day. As for the Abbé Jouve, he never knew what he was eating; he was, in fact, frequently twitted about his ignorance and his distractions. Jeanne was lying in wait for him with her eyes sparkling. When they were served:

"It is very good, the whiting is," she said, addressing the priest.

"Very good, my dear," he murmured. "Well, well, it is whiting, truly; I thought that it was turbot."

And, as everybody laughed, he unaffectedly asked why. Rosalie, who had just entered, seemed

quite hurt. Ah! well, the pastor, in her own country, was a very much better judge of dainties; he told the age of a fowl almost within a week, by merely carving it; he didn't need to enter the kitchen to know his dinner in advance, the odor sufficed. *Bon Dieu!* if she had been servant to a pastor like the Abbé, she would not now know even how to turn an omelet. And the priest excused himself with an embarrassed air, as if the absolute want of sense in gormandizing was in him a defect which he despaired of correcting. But the fact was, he was too much occupied otherwise.

"That, that's a leg of mutton," Rosalie declared as she laid the dish on the table.

Everybody laughed again, the Abbé Jouve the first. He advanced his large head, winking his small eyes.

"Yes, to be sure, it is a leg of mutton," he said. "I believe that I should have recognized it."

On that day, moreover, the Abbé was even more absent-minded than usual. He was eating

quickly, with the haste of a man whom the table tires, and who at home eats his breakfast standing; then, he was waiting for the others, and in his preoccupation answered merely with smiles. Every minute, he glanced at his brother with a look of encouragement and restlessness. Nor did Monsieur Rambaud himself seem to enjoy his habitual calm; but his trouble was evident in his desire to talk and in his restlessly fidgeting about on his chair, which was not in keeping with his meditative disposition. After the Brussels sprouts, there was an interval of silence as Rosalie was slow in bringing dessert.

Without, the downpour was more violent, a great stream was beating on the house. In the dining-room they were almost smothering.

Then Hélène was conscious of a change in their bearing, that there was between the two brothers something that they did not express. She looked at them with solicitude, and at last murmured:

"Mon Dieu! what frightful rain! — Is it not? Does it affect you, for both of you seem to be suffering?"

But they denied this and hastened to reassure her. And then, as Rosalie arrived carrying an immense dish, Monsieur Rambaud exclaimed, to conceal his emotion :

“What did I say! another surprise!”

The surprise, on that day, was a vanilla cream, one of the cook's triumphs. And it was amusing to see the broad grin with which she laid it on the table. Jeanne clapped her hands, repeating :

“I knew it, I knew it! — I had seen the eggs in the kitchen.”

“But I am no longer hungry,” continued Monsieur Rambaud with a look of despair. “It is impossible for me to eat any of it.”

Then, Rosalie became grave, full of suppressed wrath. She simply said, in a dignified tone :

“What! a cream that I made for you! — Well! try not to eat it — Yes, try —”

He resigned himself and took a large helping. The Abbé remained absent-minded. He folded his napkin, rose before the end of the dessert as often happened to him. For an instant, he walked, his head inclined to one shoulder; then,

when Hélène, in her turn, left the table, he cast on Monsieur Rambaud a significant glance, and led the young woman into the sleeping room. As they had left the door open behind them, their low voices could be heard, but without distinguishing the words.

"Hurry," said Jeanne to Monsieur Rambaud, who seemed unable to finish a biscuit, "I want to show you my work."

But he did not hurry. When Rosalie began to remove the covers, it was necessary for him to rise.

"Wait, then; wait, then," he murmured, as the child wanted to drag him into the room.

And he got away from the door, embarrassed and fearful. Then, as the Abbé raised his voice, he was seized with such a weakness that he had to sit down again at the table that had been cleared. He took a newspaper from his pocket.

"I am going to make a little carriage for you," he said.

From that time, Jeanne no longer spoke of going into the room. Monsieur Rambaud excited

her wonder by his skill in making all sorts of playthings out of a sheet of paper. He made chickens, boats, bishops' mitres, carts, and cages. But that day his fingers trembled while folding the paper, and he did not succeed in perfecting the little details. At the least noise that came from the neighboring room, he bowed his head. Jeanne, however, very much interested, had leaned against the table, beside him.

"After that, you will make a chicken," she said, "to hitch to the carriage."

At the farther end of the room, the Abbé Jouve had remained standing in the light shadow with which the lamp-screen was filling the room. Hélène had resumed her habitual place, in front of the table; and as she was not formal on Tuesday with her friends, she was working and only her white hands were visible, sewing a little child's bonnet, within the circle of the bright light.

"Jeanne gives you no uneasiness any more?" the Abbé asked.

She nodded her head before answering.

"Doctor Deberle seems quite reassured," she said. "But the poor darling is still very nervous — Yesterday I found her unconscious on her chair."

"She needs exercise," continued the priest. "You shut yourself up too much, you do not lead a sufficiently every-day life."

He stopped, there was silence; no doubt, he had found the opportunity he was seeking; but, on the point of speaking, he was collecting himself. He took a chair, sat down beside Hélène, saying :

"Listen, my dear daughter, I have desired to chat seriously with you for some time past — The life that you are leading here is not desirable. At your age, one should not cloister one's self as you are doing; and this seclusion is as bad for your child as for you — There are a thousand dangers, dangers to health and other dangers still —"

Hélène had raised her head with an expression of surprise.

"What do you mean, my friend?" she asked.

"*Mon Dieu !* I know little of the world," the priest continued, slightly embarrassed, "but yet I know that a woman is very much exposed in it, when she remains unprotected — In short, you are too much alone, and this solitude in which you bury yourself is not healthful, believe me. A day must come when you will suffer from it."

"But I do not complain, I find myself very well as I am!" she exclaimed with some animation.

The old priest gently shook his large head.

"Certainly, it is very sweet. You feel perfectly happy, I understand that. Only, on this incline of solitude and reverie, one never knows whither one is going — Oh! I know you, you are incapable of doing wrong — But you might lose your peace here sooner or later. Some morning, it would be too late, the place that you are leaving unfilled around you and within you would be found filled by some painful or unavowable emotion."

In the shade, a blush had mounted to Hélène's countenance. The Abbé, then, had read her

heart? Did he know, then, the trouble that was growing in her, that internal agitation that was filling her life, now, and which she herself until then had not wished to interrogate? Her work fell on her knees. A tenderness took possession of her, she awaited from the priest, as it were, a devout complicity, which was at last going to allow her to confess boldly and to define those vague sentiments that she was keeping back in the innermost recesses of her being. Since he knew all, he could question her and she would try to answer.

"I put myself in your hands, my friend," she murmured. "You know well that I have always listened to you."

The priest for a moment kept silent; then, slowly, gravely:

"My daughter, you must marry again," he said.

She remained mute, her arms hanging listlessly, in the stupor that such advice caused. She was awaiting further remarks, but understood no more. Yet the Abbé continued, pleading the reasons that should decide her in favor of marriage.

"Remember that you are still young —— You cannot remain any longer in this isolated quarter of Paris, hardly daring to go out, altogether ignoring life. It is necessary for you to resume the ordinary existence, to avoid the penalty of bitterly regretting your isolation later on —— You do not perceive the slow effects of this seclusion, but your friends remark your paleness and are uneasy on account of it."

He stopped at each phrase, hoping that she would interrupt him and discuss his proposition. But she remained passive, as if frozen by the surprise.

"Of course, you have a child," he continued. "That is always delicate —— Only, admit indeed that, in the interest of your Jeanne herself, a man's arm here would be of great utility —— Oh! I know that it would be necessary to find some one perfectly good, who would be a veritable father ——"

She did not permit him to finish. She spoke abruptly, with extraordinary opposition and repulsion.

“No, no, I do not desire —— What do you advise me? my friend! —— Never, do you hear, never!”

Her whole heart rebelled, she was herself frightened at the violence of her refusal. The priest's proposition had just stirred up in her that dark corner which she disliked to examine and, by the pain that she felt, she at last understood the gravity of her malady, she had the modest horror of a woman who feels her last garment slipping off.

Then, under the open and smiling glance of the old Abbé, she struggled with herself.

“But I do not wish to! I love no one!”

And as he was still looking at her, she thought that he was reading her lie on her face; and blushing, she stammered:

“Reflect, then, I left off my mourning only a fortnight ago —— No, it is not possible ——”

“My daughter,” the priest said calmly, “I have reflected a great deal before speaking. I think that your happiness is in that —— Be calm. You shall never do anything against your will.”

The conversation dropped. Hélène tried to restrain the eager protest that mounted to her lips. She took up her work, made a few stitches, with her head bowed. And, in the midst of the silence, they heard Jeanne's shrill voice saying in the dining-room:

"One does not hitch a chicken to a carriage, but a horse — Don't you know how to make horses?"

"Ah! no. Horses are too difficult," replied Monsieur Rambaud. "But if you wish, I am going to teach you how to make carriages."

It was always in that way that the play ended. Jeanne, very attentive, was looking at her good friend folding the paper in a multitude of little squares; then, she tried in her turn; but she could not and stamped her foot. However, she already knew how to make boats and bishops' mitres.

"You see," Monsieur Rambaud repeated patiently, "you make four horns like that, then you turn again —"

For an instant inclining his head, he must have caught some of the words spoken in the neighboring room; thus his poor hands became still

more agitated, and his tongue was so affected that he slurred half of his words.

Hélène, who could not calm herself, resumed the conversation.

"I marry again? and whom?" she asked the priest suddenly, replacing her work on the table. "You have some one in view, have you not?"

The Abbé Jouve had stood up and was walking slowly. He gave an affirmative sign with his head, without stopping.

"Well, tell me the person's name!" she continued.

For an instant he stood in front of her; then, slightly shrugging his shoulders, he murmured:

"What is the use, since you refuse?"

"No matter, I desire to know," she said; "how can I reach a decision if I do not know?"

He did not reply at once, but he remained standing, looking directly in her face. A somewhat sad smile mounted to his lips. Almost in a whisper he ended by saying:

"What! you have not observed it?"

No, she had not. She sought his meaning, and was surprised. Then he gave a sign; with a nod of the head he pointed to the dining-room.

"Him!" she exclaimed, smothering her voice.

She became quite grave, and no longer protested vehemently. The expression on her countenance was now only astonishment and sorrow. For a long time she remained dreamily gazing at the floor. No, certainly, she would never have guessed it; still, she found no objection. Monsieur Rambaud was the only man into whose hand she could have honestly put her own, without a fear. She knew his goodness, she did not laugh at his stupidity. But, in spite of all her affection for him, the idea that he loved her caused a cold shudder to pass over her.

Meanwhile, the Abbé had resumed his promenade from one end of the room to the other, and, as he was passing in front of the dining-room door, he gently called Hélène.

"Here, come and see."

She got up and looked.

Monsieur Rambaud had at last seated Jeanne on his own chair. He himself, at first leaning against the table, had slid down at the little girl's feet. He was on his knees in front of her, and had one of his arms around her. On the table, there was the cart with a chicken yoked to it, and boats, boxes, and bishops' mitres.

"Then, you love me much?" he said, "repeat that you love me."

"Yes, indeed, I love you well, you know it."

He hesitated, trembling, as if he had a declaration of love to risk.

"And if I asked to remain here always with you, what answer would you make?"

"Oh! I should be pleased; we would play together, would we not? that would be amusing."

"Always, understand, I should remain always."

Jeanne had taken a boat, which she changed into a gendarme's cap. She murmured:

"Ah! it would be necessary for mamma to consent."

This answer seemed to give him up to all his anxieties. His fate was decided.

"Most certainly," he said. "But if your mamma permitted it, you would not say no, yourself, would you?"

Jeanne, who was finishing her gendarme's cap, became enthusiastic, and began singing to an air of her own:

"I would say yes, yes, yes — I would say yes, yes, yes — See, then, how pretty my cap is!"

Monsieur Rambaud, moved to tears, placed himself upright on his knees and embraced her, whilst she threw her arms around his neck. He had charged his brother to ask Hélène's consent; as for himself, he tried to obtain that of Jeanne.

"You see," said the priest with a smile, "the child would like it dearly."

Hélène was still grave. She ceased to discuss. The Abbé had resumed his pleading, and he insisted on Monsieur Rambaud's merits. Was he not a father already found for Jeanne? She knew him, she would run no risk in entrusting herself to him. Then, as she kept silent, the

Abbé added with great emotion and great dignity that, if he had undertaken such a matter, he had not thought of his brother, but of her, of her happiness.

"I believe you, I know how much you love me," Hélène said with animation. "Wait, I wish to answer your brother in your presence."

Ten o'clock struck. Monsieur Rambaud entered the sleeping room. She walked to meet him, her hand extended, saying:

"I thank you for your offer, my friend, and I am very grateful to you for it. You have done wisely in speaking ——"

She looked at his face calmly and kept his big hand in hers. He, trembling, did not dare to raise his eyes.

"I ask only time to reflect," she continued, "I shall need a great deal of time, perhaps."

"Oh! all that you want, six months, a year, more," he stammered, comforted, and happy that she had not immediately given him his dismissal.

Then she smiled slightly.

Part Second Chapter II

*He had charged his brother to ask Hélène's consent ;
as for himself, he tried to obtain that of Jeanne.*

*"You see," said the priest with a smile, "the child
would like it dearly."*



"But I intend that we shall remain friends. You will come as in the past, you promise me simply to wait until I speak first 'of these things — Do you consent?"

He had withdrawn his hand, he was anxiously looking for his hat, accepting everything with a continuous nodding of the head. Then, at the moment of leaving, he found words again.

"Listen," he murmured, "you know now that I am here, do you not? Well, know that I shall always be here, whatever happens. It is all that the Abbé should have explained to you — In ten years, if you wish, you will have only to make a sign. I will obey you."

And he was the last who took Hélène's hand and pressed it most firmly. On the stairway, the two brothers turned around as was their custom, saying:

"Until Tuesday."

"Yes, until Tuesday," Hélène replied.

When she went back into the room, the noise of a fresh downpour that was beating on the blinds made her altogether sad. *Mon Dieu!* what continuous rain, and how her poor friends were

going to be drenched! She opened the window and glanced into the street. Sudden gusts of wind flickered the gas flames. And amid the pale plashings and shining network of the rain, she saw Monsieur Rambaud's round back as he was going away, happy and dancing in the dark, without seeming to mind that deluge.

Jeanne, however, was very serious, since she had caught some of her good friend's last words. She had just taken off her little boots, she was in her chemise on the edge of her bed, deeply musing. When her mother entered to kiss her, she found her thus.

"Good-night, Jeanne, kiss me."

Then, as the child seemed not to hear, Hélène crouched down in front of her, taking hold of her around the waist. And she interrogated her in an undertone:

"Would it, then, give you pleasure if he lived with us? ——"

Jeanne did not seem astonished at the question. She was thinking of those things, no doubt. Slowly, she expressed consent with a nod.

"But, you know," the mother continued, "he would be always here, by night, by day, at table, everywhere."

The little girl's bright eyes evidenced increasing impatience. She laid her head on her mother's shoulder, kissed her on the neck, and at last tremblingly asked her in a whisper:

"Mamma, would he kiss you?"

A rosy tint mounted to Hélène's brow. She knew not what answer to make at first to this child's question.

At last she murmured:

"He would be, as it were, your father, my darling."

Then Jeanne's little arms became stiff and she suddenly broke out into violent sobs. She stammered:

"Oh! no, no, I no longer want it — Oh! mamma, I entreat you, tell him that I do not want it, go and tell him that I do not want it —"

And she was smothering, she had thrown herself on her mother's breast, she covered her with

her tears and her kisses. H  l  ne tried to calm her, by repeating to her that that would be attended to. But Jeanne wanted a decisive answer immediately.

“Oh! say no, little mother, say no — You see clearly that I should die of it — Oh! won’t you say it shall never be? never!”

“Well then! no, I promise you; be quiet, go to sleep.”

For some minutes longer, the mute and excited child clasped her in her arms, as if unable to detach herself from her and as if defending her against those who would take her from her. At last, H  l  ne was able to put her to bed; but she had to watch close by her for a part of the night. She started in her sleep, and, every half-hour she opened her eyes, made sure that her mother was there, then fell asleep again, pressing her mouth against her hand.

III

It was a delightfully mild month. The April sun had greened the garden with a tender verdure, as light and fine as lace. Against the gate, the stalks of the clematis sent out their delicate shoots, whilst the honeysuckle in bud exhaled a sweet, almost sugary perfume. On both borders of the lawn, carefully kept and trimmed, red geraniums and white gillyflowers bloomed in the flower-beds. And the cluster of elms, at the lower end, in the narrow space between the neighboring buildings, shaded the green verdure with its branches, whose little leaves trembled in the lightest air.

For over three weeks, the sky was of a cloudless blue. It was, as it were, a spring miracle that celebrated the new youth, the bloom that was bursting in Hélène's heart. Each afternoon

she went down to the garden with Jeanne. She occupied the same spot against the first elm, to the right. A chair was always there for her, and on the following day she found on the gravel-walk of the alley the ends of the thread that she had scattered the day before.

"You are at home," was the regular evening greeting of Madame Deberle, who was seized with one of those passions for H  l  ne on which she lived for six months. "Adieu! until to-morrow. Try to come earlier, will you not?"

H  l  ne was at home in fact. Gradually, she accustomed herself to that green corner, she awaited the hour for going down there with childish impatience. What specially charmed her, in that bourgeois garden, was the neatness of the lawn and of the shrubs. Not a forgotten blade of grass spoiled the symmetry of the foliage. The alleys, raked every morning, were as smooth and soft to the feet as carpets. She lived there, calm and restful, not suffering from the abundance of the rising sap. Nothing to ruffle her ever issued from those clearly-outlined flower-beds,

from those mantles of ivy from which the gardener removed the yellow leaves one by one. Under the circumscribed shade of the elms, in that retired landscape which Madame Deberle's presence perfumed with a slight odor of musk, she could imagine herself to be in a salon; and only the view of the sky when she raised her head reminded her of the open air and made her breathe freely.

They often spent the afternoon together, without seeing any one. Jeanne and Lucien were playing at their feet. There were long periods of silence. Then Madame Deberle, who could not endure day-dreaming, chatted for hours, quite satisfied with Hélène's mute approbation, repeatedly given by a slight nod of the head. There were interminable stories about the ladies of her intimate acquaintance, plans of receptions for the coming winter, gossip reflections upon the events of the day, the whole chaos of mundane trifles that clashed within the limits of that pretty woman's narrow brain; all that was mingled with abrupt expressions of love for the children, with sensational

phrases that celebrated the charms of friendship. Hélène permitted her to press her hands. She was not always listening; but, in the continued tenderness by which she was surrounded, she showed herself deeply touched by Juliette's caresses, and she confessed it sweetly, with an angelic sweetness.

On other occasions a visitor was announced. Then Madame Deberle was delighted. She had abandoned her Saturdays since Easter, as was customary at that season of the year. But she dreaded solitude, and she was delighted when people came to see her without ceremony, in her garden. Her great concern, then, was to choose the seaside resort where she would spend the month of August. At each visit, she went over the same ground; she explained that her husband would not accompany her to the seaside; then she questioned people, she could not decide for herself. It was not on her own account, but on Lucien's. When the handsome Malignon arrived, he sat down astride on a rustic chair. For himself, he abhorred the country; one must

be a fool, he said, to exile one's self from Paris, under the pretext of going to catch cold on the shore of the ocean. However, he discussed the watering-places; it was all rotten, and he declared that, except Trouville, there was absolutely not one that was even a little decent. Hélène heard the same discussion every day without becoming weary, even happy in that daily monotony which lulled her and put her to sleep in a single thought. At the end of the month, Madame Deberle had not yet decided where she would go.

One evening, as Hélène was retiring, Juliette said to her:

"I am obliged to go out to-morrow; but do not let that prevent you from coming down — Wait for me, I shall not be late in returning."

Hélène accepted. She passed a delightful afternoon, alone in the garden. Over her head, she heard only the noise of the sparrows' wings, fluttering in the trees. The whole charm of that little sunny corner penetrated her. And, from that day, her happiest afternoons were those on which her friend abandoned her.

Her intercourse with the Deberles grew in intimacy. She dined with them on the footing of a friend who is prevailed upon to partake of the meal at the moment of sitting down to table; when she stayed late under the elms, and when Pierre came down the high steps, saying: "Madame is served," Juliette entreated her to remain, and she sometimes yielded. They were family dinners, enlivened by the merriment of the children. Doctor Deberle and H  l  ne appeared to be good friends, whose rational temperaments, somewhat cold, were in sympathy. And so Juliette often exclaimed:

"Oh! you would get along well together — But your evenness of manner exasperates me."

Each afternoon the doctor returned from his visits about six o'clock. He found those ladies in the garden, and sat down near them. In the beginning, H  l  ne had preferred to withdraw at once, so as to leave the household alone. But Juliette was so keenly sorry for this abrupt retirement, that she stayed now. She found herself half admitted to the inner life of that family which

seemed to be very closely united. When the doctor arrived, his wife always extended her cheek to him, with the same affectionate movement, and he kissed it; then, as Lucien mounted on his legs, he helped him to climb, he held him on his knees, chatting all the while. The child covered his mouth with his little hands, pulled his hair while he was speaking, and behaved so badly that he at last put him down on the ground, telling him to go and play with Jeanne. And H  l  ne smiled at those romps, she discontinued her work for a moment to quietly glance at the father, the mother, and the child. The husband's kiss did not embarrass her and Lucien's mischief affected her. One would have said that she found rest in the happy peace of the household.

The sun, meanwhile, was setting, was gilding the upper branches. A calm descended from the pale sky. Juliette, who had a mania for putting questions, even to the persons whom she least knew, interrogated her husband, question upon question, often without waiting for answers.

“Where have you been? what have you done?”

Then he told of his visits, spoke to her of a lady acquaintance he saluted, gave her some information as to some material or about a piece of furniture he had seen displayed. And frequently, while speaking, his eyes met Hélène's. Neither glanced aside. They looked at each other straight in the face, seriously, for a second, as if they had read each other's heart; then they smiled, and slowly lowered their gaze. Juliette's nervous liveliness, which she veiled under a studied languor, did not allow them to chat long together; for the young woman joined in all the conversations. Nevertheless, they exchanged words, slow and commonplace phrases, which seemed to express deep meaning and did not vanish when the sound of their voices ceased. They approved of each other's remarks with a slight sign, as if their thoughts were mutual. It was an absolute understanding, intimate, coming from the depths of their being, which was strengthened even in their periods of silence. Sometimes Juliette stopped her magpie chatter, a little ashamed of being always talking.

"Eh! you are hardly amused?" she said. "We chat of things that do not interest you at all."

"No, pay no attention to me," H  l  ne replied pleasantly. "I never grow weary — It is a pleasure to me to listen and to say nothing."

She did not lie. It was during her long periods of silence that she most keenly relished the charm of being there. Her head bent over her work, and raising her eyes at long intervals to exchange with the doctor those lingering looks that drew them to each other, she willingly shut herself up in the selfishness of her emotion. Between her and him, she now acknowledged that there was a hidden feeling, a very sweet something, so much the sweeter because no one in the world shared it with him. But she bore her secret calmly, without feeling that her conduct was affected, for no evil sentiment disturbed her. How pleasant he was with his wife and his child! She loved him more when he made Lucien jump and when he kissed Juliette on the cheek. Since she had seen him in his household, their friendship had grown. Now, she was, as it were, one

of the family, she did not think that any one could estrange her. And, in thinking of him, she called him Henri, naturally, through constantly hearing Juliette make use of that name. When her lips uttered "monsieur," "Henri" was echoed in all her being.

One day the doctor found H  l  ne alone under the elms. Juliette went out almost every afternoon.

"Well! my wife is not here?" he asked.

"No, she is neglecting me," she replied, laughing. "But you have come back earlier."

The children were playing at the other end of the garden. He sat down near her. Their *t  te-  t  te* in no way disturbed them. For nearly an hour they chatted of a thousand things, without for an instant desiring to allude to the tender sentiment that was swelling their hearts. Of what use was it to speak of that? Did they not know what they would have said to each other? They had no confession to make. Their joy was in being together, in their complete understanding, in their enjoyment of their undisturbed solitude,

in that very place where he embraced his wife each evening in her presence.

That day, he teased her about her rage for work.

"You know," he said, "that I do not even know the color of your eyes; you always keep them on your needle."

She raised her head, and looked at him, as she customarily did, straight in the face.

"Is it possible that you could be a tease?" she asked, sweetly.

But she continued:

"Ah! they are gray — gray with a blue shade, are they not?"

That was all they dared to say: but these words, the first thought of, assumed an infinite sweetness. From that day, he often found her alone, at dusk. Unconsciously, and despite themselves, their familiarity then made progress. They spoke in a changed voice, with affectionate inflections which were absent when any one heard them. Yet, when Juliette arrived, relating the feverish gossip of her visits in Paris, she did not

always embarrass them, they could continue their conversation, without being concerned or moving back their seats. It seemed that the fine spring weather, and the garden with its blooming lilacs, prolonged in them the first joys of passion.

Toward the end of the month, Madame Deberle was in a flurry of excitement over an important project. She had suddenly entertained the idea of giving a children's dance. The season was already well advanced, but this idea so filled her empty head that she threw herself at once into the preparations with her usual fussy activity. She wanted something very fine. The ball would be a costume affair. So she conversed of nothing but her ball, at home, at her friends' houses, everywhere. In the garden, there were endless conversations. The handsome Malignon thought the project somewhat "babyish;" but he deigned, however, to take an interest in it, and promised to engage a comic singer of his acquaintance.

One afternoon, when everybody was under the trees, Juliette raised the serious question of costumes for Lucien and Jeanne.

"I am in great doubt," she said; "I have thought of a clown's white silk suit."

"Oh! that is common!" Malignon declared. "You will have quite a dozen clowns at your ball — Stay! it ought to be something original —"

And he mused profoundly, sucking the knob of his cane.

Pauline, who arrived, exclaimed:

"As for me, I am desirous of getting myself up as a waiting-maid —"

"You!" said Madame Deberle with surprise, "but you will not be in fancy costume! Do you take yourself for a child, you big blockhead! — You will please me by coming in a white dress."

"See! that would have amused me," murmured Pauline, who, in spite of her eighteen years and the rounded figure of a pretty, young girl, delighted to romp with the young children.

Hélène, meanwhile, was working at the foot of her tree, at times raising her head to smile at the doctor and at Monsieur Rambaud, who were standing chatting in front of her. Monsieur

Rambaud had at last become intimate with the Deberles.

"And Jeanne," asked the doctor, "how will you dress her?"

But his words were cut short by an exclamation from Malignon.

"I have found it! — A Louis XV. marquis!"

And he brandished his cane with a triumphant air. Then, as those about him showed but little enthusiasm, he seemed astonished.

"What! don't you understand? — It is Lucien who receives his little guests, is it not? Well, you plant him at the salon door, as a marquis, with a big bouquet of roses at his side, and he pays his respects to the ladies."

"But," Juliette objected, "we shall have dozens of marquises!"

"What does that matter?" said Malignon quietly. "The more marquises there will be, the funnier it will be. I tell you that is the plan — It is necessary that the master of the house be a marquis, otherwise your ball is rotten."

He seemed so convinced that at last Juliette also grew excited in favor of it. Indeed, a Pompadour marquis costume of white satin worked with little bouquets would be quite delightful.

"And Jeanne?" the doctor repeated.

The little girl had come to lean against her mother's shoulder, in that coaxing attitude that she liked to assume. As H  l  ne was about to speak, she murmured:

"Oh! mamma, you know what you promised me?"

"What, then?" they asked around her.

Then, while her daughter was pleading with her looks, H  l  ne answered, smiling:

"Jeanne does not want any one to tell her costume."

"That is true!" the child exclaimed. "One cannot produce any effect at all, when one's costume is already known."

For a moment this affectation caused amusement. Monsieur Rambaud showed a teasing disposition. For some time past, Jeanne treated him gruffly; and the poor man, in despair, not

knowing how to regain his little friend's good graces, adopted a teasing way so as to win her over. He repeated on several occasions, while looking at her :

"I am going to tell it —— I am going to tell it ——"

The child became quite pale. Her sweet, suffering countenance assumed a fierce severity, her brow was furrowed by two big wrinkles, and her chin was thin and nervous.

"You," she stammered, "you, you will tell nothing ——"

And, angrily, as he was still making a pretence of intending to speak, she rushed at him, exclaiming :

"Hold your tongue, I wish you to hold your tongue ! —— I wish it ! ——"

Hélène had not had time to prevent the attack, one of those attacks of blind wrath that sometimes so terribly upset the little girl. She said severely :

"Jeanne, take care, I am going to punish you !"

But Jeanne did not heed her, or hear her. Trembling from head to foot, stamping, choking, she repeated: "I wish! —— I wish! ——" in a voice that grew hoarser and more broken; and, with trembling hands, she seized Monsieur Rambaud's arms, and twisted them with extraordinary strength. In vain did Héléne threaten her. Then, unable to subdue her by severity, and quite chagrined at that scene in the presence of everybody, she was satisfied by gently murmuring:

"Jeanne, you are giving me a great deal of trouble."

The child at once released her hold and turned around. When she saw her mother's anxious countenance, and eyes filled with restrained tears, she broke out into sobs and threw herself on her neck, stammering:

"No, mamma —— no, mamma ——"

She caressed her face with her hands to keep her from weeping. Her mother slowly pushed her aside. Then, heartbroken, beside herself, the little one sunk on a bench a few steps away,

where she sobbed still more bitterly. Lucien, to whom she was incessantly presented as an example, contemplated her with surprise and vague delight. And as Hélène folded up her work, excusing herself for such a scene, Juliette said to her: "*Mon Dieu!* one ought to forgive children everything; the little one was very good-hearted, and she grieved so much, the poor little darling, that she was already punished too much." She called her to embrace her, but Jeanne, refusing pardon, remained on the bench, smothered by tears.

Monsieur Rambaud and the doctor, however, had approached. The former bent down and asked with his kind, earnest voice:

"Let us see, my darling, why are you angry? what have I done to you?"

"Oh!" said the child, removing her hands and showing her distressed face, "you wanted to take mamma from me."

The doctor, who was listening, began to laugh. Monsieur Rambaud did not at once understand.

"What is that you say?"

"Yes, yes, the other Tuesday — Oh! you know very well, you went on your knees asking what I would say if you remained at the house."

The doctor no longer smiled. His colorless lips trembled. A blush, on the contrary, had mounted to Monsieur Rambaud's cheeks, and he lowered his voice and stammered:

"But you had said that we should always play together."

"No, no, I did not know," the child continued violently. "I do not want it, you understand! — Never speak of it again, never, and we will be friends."

Hélène, standing, with her work in a basket, had heard these last words.

"Come, go up to the house, Jeanne," she said. "One should not trouble everybody with one's weeping."

She bowed, pushing the little one before her. The doctor, very pale, was earnestly looking at her. Monsieur Rambaud was in consternation. Madame Deberle and Pauline, aided by Malignon, had taken Lucien and were turning him around

in the midst of them, discussing at a lively rate the Pompadour marquis costume for his boyish shoulders.

Next day, H  l  ne found herself alone under the elms. Madame Deberle, who was running hither and thither about her ball, had brought Lucien and Jeanne. When the doctor returned, earlier than usual, he descended the high steps briskly; but he did not take a seat, he went around the young woman, plucking fragments of bark from the trees.

She raised her eyes for a moment, restless at his agitation; then she again plied her needle with a somewhat trembling hand.

"This is disagreeable weather," she said, embarrassed by the silence. "It is almost cold this afternoon."

"We are still only in April," he murmured, making an effort to calm his voice.

He seemed anxious to leave. But he returned and abruptly asked:

"You are going to be married, then?"

This brusque question surprised her so much that she dropped her work. She was very pale.

By a supreme effort of the will, she preserved her cold air, looking at him fixedly. She did not answer, and he became a suppliant:

"Oh! I beg you, a word, a single — You are to be married?"

"Yes, perhaps, but what matters it to you?" she said at last, in an icy tone.

He made a demonstrative gesture and exclaimed:

"But it is impossible!"

"Why so?" she continued, without glancing away from him.

Then, beneath that glance, which arrested his words on his lips, he had to be silent. He remained there a moment longer raising his hands to his temples; then, choking, and fearing that he might yield to some violence, he went away, whilst she affected peacefully to resume her work.

But the spell of those sweet afternoons was broken. It was in vain that next day he showed himself tender and obedient, *Hélène* seemed ill at ease, as soon as she was alone with him. No

longer that easy familiarity, that serene confidence which permitted them to sit side by side, without a trouble, in the pure joy of being together.

In spite of his efforts not to frighten her, he sometimes looked at her and started by a sudden impulse, his countenance inflamed by a rush of blood. She herself had lost her exquisite peace; tremblings agitated her, she remained languid, with her hands weary and unoccupied.

Anger and desire in many forms seemed to have been awakened in them.

Hélène began to feel that she no longer wished Jeanne to be away from her. The doctor constantly found between her and him that witness, who watched over him with her large, clear eyes. But Hélène's especial trouble was that she felt herself suddenly embarrassed in Madame Deberle's presence. When the latter came back, her hair floating in the wind, and when she called her "my dear," while telling her of her journeys, she no longer listened to her calmly and with a smile; in her inner being a tumult arose, and feelings

that she refused to admit. Shame and bitterness had entered her heart, as it were. Then her honest nature revolted; she extended her hand to Juliette, but without being able to repress the physical shudder that the pressure of her friend's warm fingers communicated to her skin.

Meantime, the weather had been spoiled. Showers compelled those ladies to take refuge in the Japanese pavilion. The garden, so neatly kept, was changed into a lake, and one no longer dared to risk one's self in the paths, from fear of taking them away on one's soles. When a ray of sunshine again glimmered between two clouds, the wet turf was dried, the lilacs had pearls hanging on each little flower. Under the elms, heavy drops were falling.

"Well, it is on Saturday," said Madame Deberle one day. "Ah! my dear, I can stand no more of it — Is it not so? Be there at two o'clock, Jeanne will open the ball with Lucien."

And, yielding to an effusion of tenderness, delighted at the preparations for her ball, she embraced the two children; then, laughingly

taking Hélène by the arms, she also planted two big kisses on her cheeks.

"It is to reward me," she said pleasantly. "Well! I have deserved it, I have done enough running around! You will see how it will succeed."

Hélène remained quite cold, while the doctor was looking at them over the blond head of Lucien, who was clinging to his neck.

IV

In the vestibule of the little house, Pierre, in dress-coat and white cravat, was stationed to open the door as each carriage rolled up. A puff of damp air entered, a yellow ray of the rainy afternoon lit up the narrow vestibule, filled with portières and green plants. It was two o'clock, the day was declining as on a gloomy winter day.

But, as soon as the valet pushed open the door of the front salon, a bright light blinded the guests. The blinds had been closed and the curtains carefully drawn, not a glimmer of the clouded heavens entered; and the lamps placed on the furniture, the candles burning in the lustre and the crystal settings, seemed lighting a mortuary. At the lower end of the little salon, whose reseda hangings to some extent suppressed the brilliancy

of the lights, the large black and gold salon shone, decorated as if for the ball that Madame Deberle gave every year, in the month of January.

Children, meanwhile, began to arrive, whilst Pauline, very busily occupied, had rows of chairs placed in the salon, in front of the dining-room door, which they had taken down and replaced with a red curtain.

"Papa," she exclaimed, "lend a hand, then! We shall never be ready."

Monsieur Letellier, who was examining the lustre, his arms behind his back, hastened to lend a hand. Pauline herself transferred some chairs. She had obeyed her sister, by wearing a white dress; only her corsage was opened square, showing her throat.

"There we are," she continued; "they may come — But of what is Juliette thinking? She will never finish dressing Lucien."

Just then, Madame Deberle led in the little marquis. There were exclamations from every one. Oh! that love! How dainty he was, with his white satin coat figured with bouquets, his large

gold-embroidered waistcoat and his cherry-colored silk pantaloons! His chin and his delicate hands were smothered in lace. A sword, a plaything with a large red bow, was dangling on his hip.

"Come, do the honors," said his mother to him, as she led him into the first room.

For a week past, he had been repeating his lesson. Then, he planted himself cavalierly on his small legs, his powdered head thrown back a little, his three-cornered hat on his left arm; and, as each invited guest arrived, he bade welcome, offered his arm, bowed, and resumed his place. They were laughing around him, because of his grave air, with its trace of sauciness. Thus he escorted Marguerite Tissot, a little girl of five, who had a milk-maid's pretty costume, the milk-pail hung at her girdle; he led the two little Berthiers, Blanche and Sophie, one of whom was dressed as a jester and the other as a chambermaid; he even approached Valentine de Chermette, a tall girl of fourteen, whom her mother always dressed in Spanish style; and he was so slight that she seemed to carry him. But his embarrassment

was extreme in the presence of the Levasseur family, consisting of five girls, who presented themselves in the order of their heights, the youngest was scarcely two and the eldest ten years old. All five, disguised as Red-Riding-Hoods, had poppy-red satin hoods and dresses, with black velvet bands, on which broad lace aprons stood out conspicuously. He made up his mind bravely, threw aside his hat, took the tallest two, one on his right and the other on his left arm, and made his entry into the salon, followed by the other three. Everybody made quite merry, but he did not for a moment lose his fine self-assurance of a little man.

Madame Deberle, during that time, was quarrelling with her sister, in a corner.

"Is it possible! that you should have your neck bare like that!"

"Well! what does it matter? papa has said nothing," Pauline quietly replied. "If you wish, I will go and put on a bouquet."

She picked a handful of natural flowers from a flower-pot and thrust them into her bosom.

But ladies, mammas in fashionable toilets, surrounded Madame Deberle and complimented her already on her ball. As Lucien passed, his mother put back a ringlet of his powdered hair, whilst he raised himself to ask her:

“And Jeanne?”

“She is coming, my darling —— Be very careful not to fall —— Hurry, here is the little Guiraud girl —— Ah! she is dressed in Alsatian style.”

The salon was being filled, the rows of chairs in front of the red curtain were nearly all occupied, and there was a clatter of childish voices. Boys were arriving in groups. There were already three Harlequins, four Punchinellos, one Figaro, Tyroleans, and boys in Scottish tartans. Little Berthier had a page's costume. Little Guiraud, a small brat of two-and-a-half, wore his clown's costume in so funny a way that everybody picked him up to embrace him as he passed.

“Here comes Jeanne,” suddenly said Madame Deberle. “Oh! she is adorable.”

A murmur had run around; heads were bent forward, and slight exclamations were heard.

Jeanne had stopped on the threshold of the first salon, whilst her mother, still in the vestibule, was taking off her cloak. The child wore a Japanese costume, magnificent but eccentric. The dress, embroidered with strange flowers and birds, reached and covered her little feet; below the broad girdle, the flaps were turned back and showed a petticoat of greenish silk shot with yellow. Nothing was more charmingly strange than her fine face, under the towering chignon pierced by long pins, and her long chin and soft eyes, small and glistening, which gave her the appearance of a genuine Yeddo girl, walking amid the perfume of spice-bush and tea. And she remained there, hesitating, in all the sickly languor of a transplanted flower that is dreaming of its native country.

Hélène appeared behind her. Both, in passing suddenly from the dull light of the street into the brilliant glare of the candles, winked their eyelids, as if blinded, but they smiled nevertheless. That warm whiff, that odor of the salon, in which violet dominated, oppressed them a little and

flushed their fresh cheeks. Each guest, on entering, showed equal surprise and hesitation.

"Well, Lucien," said Madame Deberle.

The child had not perceived Jeanne. He hurried, took her arm, forgetting to make his bow. And they were both of them so pretty, so delicate, the little marquis with his flower-figured coat, the Japanese girl with her dress embroidered with purple, that one would have said they were two Saxony statuettes, finely painted and gilded, suddenly become alive.

"You know, I was waiting for you," Lucien murmured. "It bothers me to give my arm — Eh? we remain together."

And he installed himself with her on the first row of chairs. He quite forgot his duties as master of the house.

"Truly, I was uneasy," Juliette repeated to Hélène. "I was afraid that Jeanne was not well."

Hélène excused herself, one never got finished with children. She was still standing in a corner of the salon, in the midst of a group of ladies,

when she felt that the doctor was coming towards her from behind. He had just entered, in fact, pushing back the red curtain, behind which he had once more thrust his head, to give a final order. But he stopped abruptly. He, too, guessed who the young woman was, though she had not turned round. Clad in a black grenadine dress, she had never appeared more royally beautiful. He trembled in the freshness that she brought from without, which seemed to be exhaled from her shoulders and from her arms, visible under the transparent stuff.

"Henri sees nobody," said Pauline, laughing.
"Eh! good day, Henri."

Then he approached and saluted the ladies. Mademoiselle Aurélie, who was present, kept him for an instant to point out a nephew of hers, whom she had brought. He stayed complacently. Hélène, without a word, extended her black gloved hand to him, but he did not dare to press it very hard.

"What, you are there!" exclaimed Madame Deberle, reappearing. "I have been looking for

you everywhere — It is nearly three o'clock; they might as well begin."

"Certainly," he said. "In an instant."

At that moment, the salon was full. Around the room, under the strong light of the chandelier, the relatives formed a dark border with their visiting toilets; some ladies, bringing their seats close together, formed separate cliques; and the men, stationary along the walls, filled up the intervals; whilst, at the door of the adjoining salon, the frock-coats, more numerous, were crushing and shoving one another. All the light fell on the noisy little world that was stirring in the middle of the vast room. There were present nearly a hundred children, pell-mell, in the gay medley of the bright costumes, in which blue and rose predominated. It was a sea of blond heads, all the shades of blond, from fine ash color to old gold, set off with bows and flowers, a harvest of blond heads, which waved under the influence of noisy laughter as if stirred by the breeze. Sometimes, in that medley of ribbons and laces, silks and velvets, a face was turned; a pink nose, two

blue eyes, a smiling or pouting mouth which seemed lost. There were some no taller than a boot; these were wedged between merry wags of ten, their mothers sought them from afar without discovering them. Some of the boys were ill at ease, looking sheepish beside young girls who were spreading out their skirts. Others were already quite bold, elbowing the girls near them whom they did not know, and laughing in their faces. But the little girls remained the queens, groups of three or four friends used their chairs roughly enough to break them, while talking so loud that one could not hear one's own voice. All eyes were fixed on the red curtain.

"Attention!" said the doctor, as he went to give three slight raps at the dining-room door.

Slowly the red curtain was drawn back; and, through the opening of the door a puppet-show was seen. Then silence reigned. All of a sudden, Punchinello jumped from behind the scenes, yelling a "couic" so ferocious that little Guiraud answered it with an exclamation of terror and delight. It was one of those frightful pieces, in

which Punchinello, after having mauled the magistrate, kills the policeman and tramples with furious gayety on all laws, divine and human. At each blow of the club that split the wooden heads, the pitiless audience shrieked with laughter; the thrusts that battered the chests, the duels in which the adversaries struck on each others' skulls as on empty pumpkins, the destruction of legs and arms from which the characters emerged like jelly, redoubled the outbursts of laughter that came from all sides without intermission. Then, when Punchinello cut through the policeman's neck, at the edge of the stage, that capped the climax, the operation caused such hilarious joy that the rows of spectators jostled and fell over one another. A little girl of four, rosy and white, sanctimoniously clasped her little hands against her heart, so pretty did she consider it. Others applauded, whilst the boys, with gaping mouths, laughed in a lower key that accompanied the shrill notes of the girls.

"They are enjoying themselves!" the doctor murmured.

He had returned and placed himself near Hélène. She was as merry as the children. And standing behind her, he was becoming intoxicated with the odor that mounted from her hair. At a blow of a club, more vicious than the others, she turned around to say to him:

“You know that is very droll!”

But the excited children were now joining in the play. They responded to the actors. A young girl who must have known the drama, explained what was going to happen. “He will club his wife soon — Now they are going to hang him —” The little Levasseur girl, the youngest, she who was two years old, suddenly exclaimed:

“Mamma, are they going to put him on dry bread?”

Then followed exclamations and loudly expressed opinions. Meanwhile, Hélène was searching among the children.

“I do not see Jeanne,” she said. “Is she enjoying herself?”

The doctor leaned over, with his head near hers, and whispered:

"Look down there, between that harlequin and that Norman peasant, you see the pins of her head-dress —— She is laughing very heartily."

And he remained bending over her, feeling on his cheek the warmth of Hélène's face. Up to this time they had made no explanations; their silence permitted a familiarity which for some time was restrained only by a vague sense of trouble. But in the midst of those hearty peals of laughter, in the presence of those urchins, she again became almost a child, and surrendered herself, while Henri's breath was warming her neck. The resounding club-blows excited him almost to choking; she turned towards him, her eyes sparkling.

"*Mon Dieu!* how stupid it is!" she said each time. "Oh! how they strike!"

He replied with a shudder:

"Oh! they have hard heads."

It was all that his heart prompted him to utter. They both descended to the level of child's play. The far from exemplary life of Punchinello tired them. Then, at the climax of

the drama, when the devil appeared and there was a final battle, with a general slaughter, Hélène, in throwing herself backward, crushed Henri's hand, which was resting on the back of her chair; whilst the infantile audience, shrieking and clapping their hands, in their enthusiasm, made the chairs creak.

The red curtain had fallen. In the midst of the uproar, Pauline announced Malignon, with her habitual phrase:

"Ah! here is the handsome Malignon."

He arrived, out of breath, overturning the seats.

"Well! what a funny idea to have shut up everything!" he exclaimed in surprise, hesitating. "One would think one was entering a house of the dead."

And, turning towards Madame Deberle, who was advancing:

"You can plume yourself on having made me run! — Since this morning, I have been looking for Perdiguët, my singer, you know — But, as I have not been able to lay hands on him, I bring you the great Morizot —"

The great Morizot was an amateur who amused salon parties by juggling with small balls. They surrendered a table to him, he exhibited his prettiest feats, but without in the least exciting the spectators. The poor dear little things had become very sober. Some babes had gone to sleep, sucking their fingers. Some bigger ones turned their heads and smiled at their parents, who yawned discreetly. And so it was a general comfort when the great Morizot decided to take away his table.

"Oh! he is great," Malignon whispered in Madame Deberle's ear.

But the red curtain was lifted again, and a magic spectacle had brought all the children to their feet.

Under the bright light of the central lamp and of the two ten-branched candelabra, the dining-room stretched out, with its long table laid and decorated as if for a grand dinner. There were fifty covers. In the middle and at both ends, clumps of flowers were displayed in low baskets, separated by high fruit-dishes, on which were piled

"surprises," whose gilt and daubed papers glittered. Then there were sponge-cakes, pyramids of iced fruits, stacks of sandwiches, and, lower down, a symmetrical display of numerous plates loaded with sweetmeats and pastry; currant sweet-cake, cream confections in form of cabbages, cake alternated with dry biscuit, cracknels, and small almond-cakes. Jellies trembled in crystal vases. Cream filled porcelain bowls. And the champagne, in bottles as high as the hand and made in proportion to the height of the guests, reflected around the table the light of their silver caps. One would have said it was one of those gigantic luncheons that children might see in a dream, a luncheon served with the gravity of a grown folks' dinner, the fairy transformation of the parents' table, on which had been emptied the cornucopia of the pastry-cooks and of the dealers in toys.

"Come, arms to the ladies!" said Madame Deberle, smiling at the ecstasy of the children.

But the line could not be organized. Lucien, triumphant, had taken Jeanne's arm and walked first. The others, behind him, jostled one another

a little. It was necessary for the mammas to come and place them. And they remained there, behind the little tots particularly, whom they watched for fear of accidents. In truth, the guests at first seemed very much embarrassed; they looked at one another, they dared not touch all the good things, strangely troubled as they were at the sight of that reversed order of things, the children at table and the parents standing. Finally, the larger ones grew bold and reached out their hands. Then, when the mammas mingled with them, cutting the sponge-cakes, serving all around them, the luncheon was lively and soon became very noisy. The orderly arrangement of the table was upset as if by a squall; everything was going around at the same time in the midst of the extended arms, which emptied the dishes as they passed. The two little Berthiers, Blanche and Sophie, laughed at seeing their plates crowded with everything, confectionery, cream, cake, and fruit. The five Levasseur damsels monopolized a corner in delicacies, whilst Valentine, proud of her fourteen years, played the demure lady by

concerning herself about her neighbors. Lucien, however, to show his gallantry, opened a bottle of champagne, but so awkwardly that he came near spilling its contents on his cherry-colored silk pantaloons. It was an event.

"Will you, then, let the bottles alone!"

"It is I who am to open the champagne!" Pauline exclaimed.

She made an extraordinary stir, amusing herself on her own account. As soon as a domestic arrived, she snatched the chocolate pot from him and took extreme pleasure in filling the cups, with the readiness of a café waiter. She handed around ices and glasses of syrup, then she dropped everything to stuff some tiny girl whom they were forgetting, and started off again questioning first one, then another.

"What do you wish, my big fellow? eh? a slice of cake? —— Wait, my dear girl, I am going to pass you the oranges —— Eat away, you big ninnies, you will play afterward!"

Madame Deberle, more calm, insisted that they should be left in peace, and they would get along

all right. At one end of the room, Hélène and some ladies were laughing at the spectacle of the table. All those rosy mouths were crunching with their beautiful white teeth. And nothing was so droll as when, forgetting the manners of well-bred children, they sometimes abandoned themselves to the pranks of young savages. They held their glasses with both hands, to drain them to the bottom, besmeared themselves and stained their costumes. The hubbub increased. They pillaged the last plates. Jeanne herself danced on her chair on hearing a quadrille played in the salon; and said, as her mother advanced, reproaching her with having eaten too much:

“Oh! mamma, I am so well to-day!”

But the music had made other children rise. Gradually the table was deserted, and soon there remained only a big baby in the very centre. It seemed to be making fun of the piano. With a napkin around its neck, its chin resting on the table-cloth, so small was it, it opened its large eyes and reached out its mouth, every time that its mother offered it a spoonful of chocolate. The

cup was emptied, it allowed its lips to be wiped, while still swallowing, and opening its eyes wider.

"Deuce! my good fellow, you are doing well!" said Malignon, who was looking at it in a dreamy way.

Then followed the distribution of the "surprises." Each of the children on leaving the table carried off one of the large gilt sugar-plums, from which they hastened to tear off the envelope; and out came playthings, grotesque head-dresses of thin paper, birds and butterflies. But the great fun was the crackers. Each "surprise" contained a cracker which the boys bravely fired off, delighted at the noise, whilst the girls shut their eyes, being caught on several occasions. For an instant only the dry crackling of that musketry was heard. And it was in the midst of the uproar that the children returned to the salon, where the piano ceaselessly played quadrille figures.

"I would like to eat a brioche," whispered Mademoiselle Aurélie as she sat down.

Some ladies then installed themselves at the table that remained unoccupied, still covered with

the confused leavings of that colossal dessert. There were half a score of them who had prudently waited in order to eat. As they could not get hold of a waiter, Malignon made himself useful. He emptied the chocolate pot, examined the bottom of the bottles, and succeeded even in finding ices. But, while showing himself gallant, he was always reverting to the singular idea that led them to draw the blinds.

"Certainly," he repeated, "we are in a vault."

Hélène had remained standing, chatting with Madame Deberle. The latter was returning to the salon and Hélène was getting ready to follow her, when she felt herself gently touched. The doctor was smiling behind her. He did not leave her.

"You take nothing, then?" he asked.

And into that commonplace phrase he put an entreaty so earnest that she felt much annoyed. She well understood that he was speaking to her of something else. She grew excited gradually, amid the gayety that surrounded her. That little world leaping and shouting made her feverish.

Her cheeks rosy, her eyes shining, she at first refused.

"No, thank you, nothing at all."

But, as he insisted, and restless through her desire to get rid of him, she said:

"Well, then, a cup of tea."

He ran and brought the cup. His hands trembled while presenting it. And while she was drinking, he approached her, his lips swollen and trembling from the avowal that mounted from his heart. Then she drew back, handed him the empty cup, and ran away while he was laying it on a dresser, leaving him in the dining-room alone with Mademoiselle Aurélie, who was in the act of masticating slowly and inspecting the plates methodically.

The piano was being played very loud, at the lower end of the salon. And, from end to end, the ball was going on briskly with glorious merri-ment. They made a circle around the quadrille in which Jeanne and Lucien danced. The little marquis mixed up the figures a little; he got on all right only when he had to take hold of

Jeanne; then he took her around her waist, and whirled about. Jeanne balanced like a lady, annoyed at seeing him crumple her costume; then, carried away by pleasure, she seized him in her turn, lifting him from the floor. And the white satin coat worked with flowers, blending with the dress embroidered with odd flowers and birds, the two little antique Dresden figures assumed the grace and oddity of a what-not group.

After the quadrille, H  l  ne called Jeanne so as to fasten her dress.

"It is he, mamma," said the little one. "He jostles me, he is unbearable."

The parents grouped around the salon were smiling. When the piano-playing recommenced, all the toddlers leaped again. They felt confused, however, on seeing that people were looking at them, and remained serious, contenting themselves with romping, so as to appear well-behaved. Some knew how to dance, but most of them being ignorant of the figures, kept moving on one spot, finding their limbs very much in the way. But Pauline interfered.

"I shall have to take a hand in it — Oh! the blockheads!"

She threw herself into the middle of the quadrille, took two of them by the hands, one on the left, the other on the right, and gave such a swing to the dance that the boards of the floor creaked. One heard but the helter-skelter of the little feet beating time with the heel, whilst the piano alone continued to keep the regular time. Other grown-up women joined in the dance. Madame Deberle and H  l  ne, noticing bashful young girls who did not like to venture, led them into the thickest. They conducted the figures, urged on the cavaliers, formed the sets; and the mothers passed the little babies to them, so that they might make them dance for a moment, holding them with both hands. The ball was then at its best. The dancers gave themselves up with joyous hearts, laughing and jostling one another, as at a boarding-school when the scholars are suddenly possessed of a joyous madness, in the absence of the master. Nothing was more obviously gay than that urchins' carnival,

with those bits of men and women who were mingling there, in a miniature world, the fashions of all peoples, the fancies of romance and of the stage. Those rosy mouths and blue eyes, those tender looks gave a childhood freshness to the costumes. One would have said it was the fête of a fairy tale, with Loves disguised for the betrothal of some Prince Charming.

"It is stifling," said Malignon. "I am going out to breathe the air."

He went out throwing the salon door wide open. The broad daylight of the street then entered in a pale flash of light, which dimmed the brilliancy of the lamps and of the candles. And every quarter of an hour Malignon had the door swung.

But the piano-playing continued. Little Guiraud, with her black Alsatian butterfly on her blond hair, was dancing in the arms of a Harlequin twice as tall as herself. A boy in tartan made Marguerite Tissot whirl so rapidly that on the way she lost her milkmaid's pail. The two Berthiers, Blanche and Sophie, were inseparable and

danced together, the chambermaid in the arms of the Jester, whose bells jingled. One could not cast a glance at the dance without encountering a Levasseur girl; the Red-Riding-Hoods seemed to multiply; everywhere there were hoods and dresses of poppy-red satin with bands of black velvet. So as to dance with ease, some tall boys and girls had taken refuge at the lower end of the other salon. Valentine de Chermette, enveloped in her Spanish mantle, exhibited some skillful steps, facing a young gentleman in a dress-coat. All of a sudden, there were bursts of laughter, everybody was called to look; in a corner behind a door, little Guiraud, the two-year-old clown, and a little girl of his own age, dressed as a peasant, were holding each other in tight embrace, fearing a fall, and whirling around all alone as if on the sly, cheek against cheek.

"I can dance no longer," said Hélène, as she came to lean her back against the dining-room door.

She was fanning herself, flushed from the exercise. Her chest heaved under the transparent

grenadine of her waist. Again she felt Henri's breath on her shoulders, for he was there behind her. She realized then that he was going to speak: but she had not the strength now to escape his avowal. He approached, and with his lips touching her hair, whispered:

"I love you! oh! I love you!"

It was as if a breath of fire was burning her from head to foot. *Mon Dieu!* he had spoken, no longer could she feign the sweet peace of ignorance. She concealed her empurpled countenance behind her fan. The children, in the excitement of the last quadrilles, were tapping their heels more heavily. Bursts of silver laughter sounded, musical voices expressed pleasure. A freshness ascended from that circle of innocents let loose in a galop of little demons.

"I love you! oh! I love you!" Henri repeated.

She trembled again, she desired to hear no more. She was giddy and took refuge in the dining-room. But that room was empty, save that Monsieur Letellier was peacefully asleep on a chair. Henri had followed her. He boldly took hold of her

hands, at the risk of a scandal, and his countenance was transfigured so by passion that she trembled. He still repeated :

“I love you — I love you —”

“Leave me,” she murmured feebly, “leave me, you are mad —”

The dance continued beside them with its helter-skelter of little feet! Blanche Berthier’s bells were heard accompanying the deadened notes of the piano. Madame Deberle and Pauline clapped their hands to mark the time. It was a polka.

Hélène could see Jeanne and Lucien pass smiling, their arms encircling each other.

Then, with an abrupt movement, she broke loose, and fled into an adjoining room into which the broad light of day was entering. That sudden light blinded her. She was afraid, but was not in a condition to enter the salon again, because of the passion which must be visible on her countenance. So, crossing the garden, she went up to her own home, followed by the floating sounds of the ball.

V

Up there, in her room, in that calmness of the cloister that she found again, Hélène felt herself choking. The apartment astonished her, it was so peaceful, so shut in, so drowsy under the blue velvet hangings, while she bore thither the brief and burning breath of the emotion that was agitating her. Was that her room, that silent corner of solitude where she now needed air? Hurriedly, she opened a window and leaned on her elbow with Paris before her.

The rain had ceased, the clouds were scattering, like a monstrous flock, whose disbanded file was losing itself in the mists of the horizon. A blue cleft had been formed over the city, slowly growing wider. But Hélène, whose elbows trembled on the sill, still out of breath from having ascended too quickly, saw nothing and heard only her heart

beating with strong throbs that made her throat swell. She drew long breaths; it seemed to her that the immense valley, with its river, its two millions of lives, its giant city, its distant hillsides, had not enough air to give regularity and peace to her breathing.

For some minutes she remained there, lost, in that crisis that entirely engrossed her. It seemed to her like a rushing of confused sensations and thoughts within her, whose murmur prevented her from hearing and understanding herself. Her ears buzzed, she saw broad clear spots traveling slowly. She surprised herself examining her gloved hands, and remembering that she had forgotten to sew on a button on her left-hand glove. Then she spoke quite loud, she repeated several times in a voice gradually sinking lower and lower:

“I love you —— I love you —— *Mon Dieu!*
I love you ——”

And, with an instinctive movement, she rested her face in her joined hands, pressing her fingers on her closed eyelids, as if to increase the darkness into which she plunged. A desire to destroy

herself took possession of her, to no longer see, to be alone in the depth of darkness. Her breathing was calmed. Paris fanned her countenance with its powerful breath; she felt it was there, but was not willing to look at it, and yet she was seized with apprehension at the thought of leaving the window, and of no longer having beneath her that city whose limitless boundaries soothed her.

Ere long, she forgot all. The scene of the avowal, in spite of her, reappeared to her. On a background of inky black, Henri appeared with singular distinctness, so very lifelike that she distinguished the nervous twitchings of his lips. He approached, he leaned over her. Then, madly, she threw herself backward. Even then, she felt a fire touch her shoulders, she heard a voice: "I love you — I love you —" Then, after having banished the vision with a supreme effort, she saw it take form again farther off, slowly enlarged; and it was again Henri that followed her into the dining-room, with the same words: "I love you — I love you —" the repetition

of which sounded within her like the continued tones of a bell. No other sound vibrated through her frame, only those words. It was breaking her heart. Yet she wished to reflect, she strove again to escape from Henri's image. He had spoken, never would she dare to see him face to face. His masculine violence had just wrecked their tenderness. And she recalled the hours when he loved her without uttering the cruel confession, those hours spent at the bottom of the garden, in the serenity of the nascent spring. *Mon Dieu!* he had spoken! That thought was persistent, and grew so big and heavy, that a thunderbolt destroying Paris in front of her would not have appeared to her of equal importance. There was in her heart a feeling of indignant protest, of proud anger, mingled with a dull and invincible pleasure that ascended from her inmost nature and was intoxicating her. He had spoken and he was still speaking, he appeared persistently, with those brutal words: "I love you — I love you —," which blotted out all her past life of spouse and mother.

Amid all those reveries, she was conscious of the vast expanses that were unfolded under her, behind the night which she was shutting out. A loud voice rose, waves of life were spreading out and surrounding her. The noises, the odors, and even the light were beating on her face, in spite of her nervously-pressed hands. At moments, sudden glimmers seemed to pierce her closed eyelids; and, in those glimmers, she thought she saw the monuments, the spires, and the domes being detached on the diffused daylight of the dream. Then she removed her hands, she opened her eyes, and remained dazzled. The sky had become hollow, Henri had disappeared.

Near the horizon only, a heaped-up bank of clouds resembled a ruin of chalky rocks. Now, in the pure air, of an intense blue, only light flocks of white clouds passed by, sailing slowly, like flotillas of sails, swelled by the wind. To the north, over Montmartre, there was a network of extreme fineness, like a net of pale silk stretched out in a corner of the heavens, for fishing in that calm sea. But, to the west, towards the Meudon

hillsides which Hélène could not see, the tail of the shower was yet to drown the sun, for Paris, under the riven clouds, remained gloomy and soaked, effaced in the mist of the drying roofs. The city was of a uniform tint, the bluish gray of slate, spotted with black by the trees, very clear, however, with the clearly-marked roofs and the thousands of windows. The Seine was of the dull brightness of an old silver ingot. On its two banks, the monuments seemed painted a sooty stone color; the Saint-Jacques tower, as if eaten with rust, exhibited itself like some museum antiquity, whilst the Panthéon, above the darkened quarter that it surmounted, assumed the outline of a giant catafalque. Only the Invalides dome preserved the brightness of its gildings; one would have said that they were lamps burning in broad daylight, with a dreamy melancholy in the midst of the twilight mourning that draped the city. Outlines were wanting; Paris, veiled in a cloud, was being charred on the horizon, like a colossal and delicate spindle-tree, quite vigorous under the limpid heavens.

Hélène, face to face with that gloomy city, was dreaming that she did not know Henri. She was very strong now that his image ceased to pursue her. She revolted at the idea that in a few weeks that man had filled her life, and, rebellious, she denied it. No, she did not know him. She was ignorant of everything about him, his acts, his thoughts; she could not even have said whether he was very intellectual. Perhaps he was even more wanting in heart than in mind. And she thus exhausted every supposition, her heart swelling with the bitterness that she found at the bottom of each, always stumbling at her ignorance, that wall that separated her from Henri and prevented her from knowing him. She knew nothing, she would never know anything. She imagined him to herself as nothing more than brutal, breathing burning words on her, bringing her the only trouble that, until that hour, had disturbed the happy evenness of her life. Whence did he come, then, to afflict her in that way? Suddenly she thought that, six weeks before, she did not exist for him, and that idea was unbearable

to her. *Mon Dieu!* not to be for each other, to pass without seeing each other, not to meet perhaps! She had joined her hands in despair and tears moistened her eyes.

Then Hélène looked fixedly at the Notre-Dame towers in the distance. A ray, escaping from between two clouds, was gilding them. Her head was heavy, as if overloaded with the tumultuous ideas that were clashing therein. She was suffering, and wished to be interested in Paris, to find her rest again, while carrying her daily peaceful looks over the ocean of roofs. How often, at that hour, the mystery of the great city, in the calm of a fine evening, had lulled her with a tender dream! Meanwhile, before her, Paris was illumed with flashes of sunlight. The first ray that had fallen on Notre-Dame had been succeeded by others that reached the city. The sun, on its decline, scattered the clouds. Then, the quarters appeared spread out, in a medley of shades and lights. For a moment, the whole left bank was of a leaden gray, whilst circular spots of light dotted the right bank, unfolded on the edge of

Part Second Chapter XV

Monsieur Letellier was peacefully asleep on a chair. Henri had followed her. He boldly took hold of her hands, at the risk of a scandal, and his countenance was transfigured so by passion that she trembled. He still repeated :

“I love you —— I love you ——”



the river like a gigantic wild beast's skin. Then the forms changed and displaced one another, at the pleasure of the wind that bore the clouds along. On the golden tint of the roofs there were black layers all traveling in the same direction, with the same gentle and noiseless gliding. Enormous ones, sailing with the majestic air of an admiral's ship, were surrounded by smaller ones that kept the precision of a squadron in the order of battle. An immense, elongated shadow, opening like a reptile's mouth, shut off Paris for an instant, and seemed to wish to devour it. And, when it was lost down on the horizon and reduced to the size of an earth-worm, a ray, whose beams burst in a shower from the crevice of a cloud, fell in the empty hollow that it left. One saw its golden dust fall like a fine sand, spread out like a vast cone and rain incessantly over the Champs-Élysées quarter, which it spangled with a dancing light. For a long time that shower of sparks lasted, like a continuous discharge from a rocket.

Well! the passion was fatal, Hélène no longer resisted. She felt herself at the end of her strength

in her fight against her heart. Henri could take her, she gave herself up. She tasted then an inexhaustible happiness in the absence of all struggling. Why should she continue to refuse? Had she not waited long enough? The memory of her past life filled her with contempt and fierceness. How had she been able to endure that cold life of which she was formerly so proud? She pictured herself once more a young girl at Marseilles, in the Rue des Petites-Maries, that street in which she had always shivered; she again saw herself married, chilled beside that big boy who kissed her bare feet and burying herself in the depths of housekeeping cares as a refuge; she saw herself again at every hour of her life, with even step pursuing her routine life, without an emotion that could disturb her calm; and now that uniformity, that sleep of love that she had slept, exasperated her. To think that she believed herself happy in the prospect of living thus for thirty years, her heart mute and having only her pride of an honest woman to fill the void of her being! Ah! what a deception was that strictness, that

scrupulousness of the just that limited her to the sterile enjoyments of devout people! No, no, she had had enough of it, she would live! And a terrible mockery opposed her reason. Her reason! in truth, it was worthless, that reason which, in an already long life, had not brought her a sum of joy comparable to the bliss she had tasted for an hour past. She had refused to yield, she had had the imbecile boastfulness to believe that she could proceed thus until the end, without meeting with a single painful obstacle. Well! to-day, she sought the fall, she would have wished it immediate and deep. Her whole rebellion ended in that imperious desire. Oh! to disappear in an embrace, to live in a minute all that she had not lived!

In her innermost self, however, there was an overflowing sorrow, an internal oppression, with a sensation of void and darkness. Then she pleaded. Was she not free? In loving Henri, she deceived no one, she bestowed her tenderness as she pleased. Did not everything excuse her? What had been her life for nearly two years past? She

realized that everything had softened and prepared her for the passion: her widowhood, her absolute liberty, her solitude. The passion must have been brooding in her, during the long evenings spent between her two old friends, the Abbé and his brother, those simple men whose serene dispositions soothed her; it was brooding when she shut herself up so closely, away from the world, before Paris grumbling on the horizon; it was brooding each time that she had leaned on her elbow at that window, plunged in one of those reveries formerly unknown to her, and which, little by little, made her so inactive. A reminiscence came to her, that of that clear spring morning, with the white and clear city as if under a crystal, Paris as fair as a child, which she had so lazily contemplated while stretched on her reclining-chair, her book fallen to her knees. On that morning, love was awakened, there was scarcely a shiver that she knew not how to explain and against which she thought herself fortified. To-day, she was in the same place, but the victorious passion was devouring her, whilst, in

front of her, a sinking sun seemed to be setting the city on fire. It seemed to her that one day had been sufficient, that this was the empurpled evening of that limpid morning, and she believed she felt all those flames burning in her heart.

But the sky had changed. The sun, descending towards the Meudon hillsides, had just dispersed the last clouds and was again resplendent. The azure was aglow with splendor. On the edge of the horizon, the ruins of chalky rocks that barred the distances of Charenton and Choisy-le-Roi, appeared like blocks of carmine edged with bright lake; the flotilla of little clouds sailing slowly in the blue, over Paris, was covered with purple veils; whilst the thin network, the film of white silk stretched above Montmartre, appeared suddenly as if made of a gold cord, with its regular meshes to catch the stars on their rising. And stretched out under that glowing vault lay the entire yellow city, striped with great shadows. Below, on the vast place, along the avenues, hacks and omnibuses were crossing one another through an orange-colored dust, amid the swarms of

passers-by, whose black groups were becoming fair, brightened by the spots of light. A seminary, in close file, which wended along the Quai de Billy, showed a string of cassocks, of ochre color, in the diffused brightness. Then, the carriages and pedestrians were lost, and very far off, on some bridge, one could only imagine a file of equipages, whose lamps twinkled. To the left, the tall chimneys of the Manutention, erect and red, emitted huge wreaths of light smoke, of a delicate flesh tint; whilst, on the other side of the river, the fine elms of the Quai d'Orsay formed a dark mass, broken by dashes of sunshine. The Seine, crossed from bank to bank by oblique rays, rolled in dancing waves, on which blue, yellow, and green broke in a luminous medley; but, on going up the river, that Oriental sea coloring assumed a single tint of gold, increasingly dazzling; and one would have said it was an ingot poured out at the horizon from some invisible crucible, spreading out and scattering bright colors, in proportion as it cooled. The step-like bridges, their light arches growing more slender, cast over

that shining stream gray bars, which were lost in a fiery massing of houses, at the summit of which the two towers of Notre-Dame blazed like torches. To right, to left, the monuments flamed. The crystal roof of the Palais-de-l'Industrie, amid the tall trees of the Champs-Élysées, displayed a layer of burning brands; farther on, behind the flat roof of the Madeleine, the enormous mass of the Opéra seemed a block of copper; and the other edifices, the cupolas and the towers, the Vendôme column, the Saint-Vincent de Paul church, the Saint-Jacques tower, and nearer, the pavilions of the new Louvre and of the Tuileries, were crowned with flames, raising gigantic bonfires at each square. The Invalides dome was on fire, and so sparkling that at every minute one might fear to see it collapse, covering the quarter with the sparks of its wood-work. Beyond the odd towers of Saint-Sulpice, the Panthéon stood out against the sky with a dull splendor, like a royal palace in the grasp of a fire that would burn it to a cinder. Then all Paris, in proportion as the sun sank, was lit up with the fires of

the monuments. Gleams ran along the crests of the roofs, whilst in the valleys, black fumes slept. All the façades turned toward the Trocadéro were reddened, while reflecting the sparkling of their windows, a shower of sparks that mounted from the city, as if some bellows had incessantly stirred up that colossal forge. From the neighboring quarters, where the streets were channeled, gloomy and baked, there shot up, ever and anon, brilliant gerbes. Even in the distant plain, from the bottom of a bed of red ashes that buried the ruined and still warm faubourgs, shone wandering rockets, that had burst forth from some fireplace suddenly rekindled. Ere long it was a furnace. Paris burned. The sky was still more empurpled, the clouds were bleeding above the immense red and gold city.

Hélène, bathed by those flames, and giving herself up to that passion which was consuming her, was looking at Paris blazing, when a little hand that was placed on her shoulder made her start. Jeanne called her.

“Mamma! mamma!”

And when she had turned around :

"Ah! it is fortunate! — You do not hear, then? Ten times have I called you."

The little one, still dressed as a Japanese girl, showed her eyes bright and her cheeks quite rosy with pleasure. She did not give her mother time to answer.

"You escaped me neatly — You know that they looked for you everywhere to the last. Without Pauline, who accompanied me to the foot of the stairs, I should not have dared to pass through the street."

And, with a pretty movement, she brought her face close to her mother's lips, asking without interruption :

"You love me?"

Hélène kissed her, but in a mechanical manner. She felt some surprise, as it were, some impatience at seeing her return so soon. Was it really an hour since she had escaped from the ball?

To answer the questions of the child, who was becoming restless, she said that she had felt a

slight discomfort. The air did her good. She needed a little quiet.

"Oh! do not be afraid, I am too tired," Jeanne murmured. "I am going to remain here, I will be very good — But, little mother, I may speak, may I not?"

She placed herself close to Hélène, pressing against her, and delighted that she was not undressed at once. Her embroidered purple dress, her greenish silk petticoat, delighted her; and she shook her fine head, to hear the jingling on her hair of the pendants of the long pins that traversed it. Then a flood of hurried words came from her lips. She had looked at everything, listened to everything and remembered everything, in spite of her silly air that suggested she had understood nothing. Now she took her revenge for having remained quiet, with closed mouth and listless look.

"You know, mamma, it was a good-natured old man, with gray beard, that made Punchinello go. I saw him plainly when the curtain was lifted — Little Guiraud was weeping. He is stupid. Eh? Then, some one told him that the policeman

would come and put water in his soup, and they had to take him away, he cried so — It was the same at lunch, Marguerite completely smeared her milkmaid costume with the comfits. Her mamma wiped her, exclaiming: ‘Oh! you dirty girl!’ Marguerite was all covered with it, even to her hair — As for me, I said nothing, but I was greatly amused looking at them attacking the cakes. They are badly brought up, are they not, little mother?”

She stopped for a few seconds, absorbed in thought, then she asked with a pensive air:

“Tell me, mamma, did you eat any of that yellow cake that had white cream inside? Oh! it was good! it was good! I kept the dish all the time at my side.”

Hélène was not listening to this childish babbling. But Jeanne was talking to comfort herself, her head too full. She set off again, telling the events of the ball in copious detail. The least trifle assumed enormous importance.

“You did not notice, when they began, that my belt came loose. A lady whom I do not

know put a pin in it. I said to her: 'I thank you very much, madame ——' Then, Lucien, while dancing, pricked himself. He asked me: 'What have you there in front that stabs?' I had forgotten and I answered that I had nothing. It was Pauline who came to me and put the pin as it ought to be —— No, you have no idea! They jostled one another, a big blockhead of a boy gave a thump in the back to Sophie, who nearly fell. The Levasseur girls jumped close-legged. It is not like that that one dances, certainly —— But the finest, you see, was the finish. You were no longer there, so you cannot know. They took one another by the arms, they whirled around in a circle; it was enough to kill one with laughter. There were tall gentlemen, too, who whirled around. Quite true, I am not lying! —— Why don't you wish to believe me, little mother?"

Hélène's silence at last provoked her. She pressed herself more closely, and shook her hand. Then, seeing that she drew only short words from her, she herself became gradually silent, lapsing also

into reverie, dreaming of that ball that filled her young heart. Both the mother and the daughter remained mute, opposite the blazing Paris. It was still more unknown to them, thus lit up by the bleeding clouds, like some legendary city expiating its passion under a rain of fire.

"They danced a round dance?" Hélène asked all of a sudden, as if waking with a start.

"Yes, yes," murmured Jeanne, absorbed in her turn.

"And the doctor? did he dance?"

"I should think so, he whirled with me — He raised me up, he questioned me: 'Where is your mamma? where is your mamma?' Then he embraced me."

Hélène smiled unconsciously. She was laughing at his tenderness. Why need she know Henri? It seemed to her sweeter to ignore him, to ignore him forever, and to receive him as him whom she had been expecting for so long a time. Why would she be astonished and disturbed? He had just crossed her path at the appointed time. That was good. Her frank

nature accepted everything. A calm settled upon her, due to the thought that she loved and that she was loved. And she said to herself that she would be strong enough not to spoil her happiness.

Meantime night had come, a cold wind chilled the air. Jeanne, who was musing, shivered.

She laid her head on her mother's breast; and, as if the question was connected with her profound reflections, she murmured a second time :

"You love me?"

Hélène, still smiling, took her head between her hands and appeared for a moment to scrutinize her countenance. Then for a long time she put her lips close to her mouth, over a little rosy mark. It was there, she saw plainly, that Henri had kissed the child.

The dark ridge of the Meudon hills was already encroaching on the circular disk of the sun. Over Paris, the oblique rays were still stretched out. The shadow of the Invalides dome, immeasurably enlarged, bathed the whole Saint-Germain quarter;

whilst the Opéra, the Saint-Jacques tower, the columns and the spires, striped the right bank with black. The lines of the fronts, the hollows of the streets, the raised islets of the roofs, were burning with less vivid intensity. In the darkened windows, the burning sparks were dying out, as if the houses had fallen in embers. Distant bells rang, an uproar rolled upward and quieted down. And the sky spread out at the approach of evening, overarched the reddening city with its violet sheet, veined with gold and purple. All at once there was a formidable revival of the conflagration, Paris threw out a last glare that lit up all as far as the distant faubourgs. Then it seemed as if gray ashes fell, and the quarters stood up, faint and blackish like extinct embers.

PART THIRD

I

One May morning, Rosalie ran from the kitchen, without dropping the dish-clout that she was holding; and, with the familiarity of a spoiled servant, cried:

"Oh! madame, come quick —— The Abbé is down there, in the doctor's garden in the act of digging up the ground!"

Hélène did not budge. But Jeanne had already rushed to see. When she returned, she exclaimed:

"How stupid Rosalie is! he is not digging up the ground at all. He is with the gardener, who is putting some plants in a cart —— Madame Deberle is picking all her roses ——"

"It must be for the church," Hélène said quietly, very much taken up with a piece of tapestry work.

Some minutes later, there was a tinkle of the bell, and the Abbé Jouve appeared. He came to

announce that he must not be counted on for the following Tuesday. His evenings were taken up by the ceremonies of the month of Mary. The pastor had charged him with adorning the church. It would be superb. All these ladies were giving him flowers. He was waiting for two palm-trees over four yards high to place to right and left of the altar.

"Oh! mamma —, mamma —," murmured Jeanne, who was listening in wonderment.

"Well! you do not know, my friend," said Hélène, smiling; "since you cannot come, we will go and see you — See how you are turning Jeanne's head with your bouquets."

She was by no means devout, she never even attended Mass, alleging as her excuse her daughter's health, and saying that on leaving the church she shivered.

The old priest avoided talking to her of religion. He merely said, with a tolerance full of good nature, that good souls attain their salvation alone, by their virtue and their charity. God would indeed deign one day to move her.

Until the following evening, Jeanne thought only of the month of Mary. She questioned her mother, she dreamt of the church filled with white roses, with thousands of candles, celestial voices, and sweet odors. And she wished to be near the altar, the better to see the Holy Virgin's lace dress, a dress that was worth a fortune, said the Abbé. But Hélène calmed her, by threatening not to take her if she made herself sick in advance.

At last, in the evening, after dinner, they set out. The nights were still fresh. On arriving in the Rue de l'Annonciation, where Notre-Dame de Grâce stands, the child was shivering.

"The church is heated," said her mother. "We will get close to a radiator."

When she had pushed open the padded door, which moved back gently, they were surrounded with warm air, whilst a bright light burst forth and singing greeted them. The ceremony had begun. Hélène, seeing the central nave already full, wanted to go up one of the aisles. But she had all the difficulty in the world in approaching the altar. She was holding Jeanne's

hand and was advancing patiently; but abandoning the attempt to get further, she took the first two free chairs that were at hand. A pillar hid the middle of the choir from them.

"I can see nothing, mamma," murmured the little one, quite grieved. "We are very badly placed."

Hélène made her keep silent. The child then began to pout. She could see, in front of her, only the enormous back of an old lady. When her mother looked around, she found her standing on her chair.

"Will you sit down!" she said, smothering her voice. "You are unbearable."

But Jeanne was obstinate.

"Listen, then, I see Madame Deberle — She is down there in the middle. She is making signs to us."

Strong opposition made the young woman impatient. She shook the little one, who refused to be seated. Since the ball, for three days, she had avoided returning to the doctor's, pretending a thousand preoccupations.

"Mamma," Jeanne continued with the obstinacy of children, "she is looking at you, she is bidding you good-day."

Hélène was compelled to look and bow. The two women nodded to each other. Madame Deberle, in a silk dress with numerous stripes, trimmed with white lace, occupied the centre of the nave, two steps from the choir; she was very bright and observant. She had brought her sister Pauline, who began to wave her hand excitedly. The chants continued, the full tone of the multitude rolled on a descending scale whilst the treble notes of children here and there broke the dragging and balanced rhythm of the canticle.

"You can see plainly that they are asking you to come!" Jeanne continued, triumphant.

"It is useless, we are perfectly comfortable here."

"Oh! mamma, let us go and join them — They have two chairs."

"No, get down, be seated."

However, as those ladies insisted with smiles, without being concerned in the least about the slight scandal that they raised, happy, on the

contrary, at having people turn towards them, Hélène had to yield. She pushed Jeanne, who was delighted, and tried to open a way for herself, her hands trembling from restrained wrath. It was not an easy task. The devout did not like to be disturbed and angrily measured her from head to foot, while, with open mouth, they continued singing. She struggled thus for five full minutes, in the midst of the tempest of voices, which swelled louder. When she could not pass, Jeanne looked at all the open, dark mouths, and pressed close to her mother. At last they reached the unoccupied space in front of the choir, they had only a few steps to take.

“Come here, then,” murmured Madame Deberle. “The Abbé told me that you would come, and I have kept two seats for you.”

Hélène returned thanks, immediately afterwards turning over the leaves of her Mass book, so as to cut the conversation short. But Juliette did not abandon her worldly airs; she was quite at ease there, charming and babbling as in her salon. So she leaned over, continuing:

"We see you no more. I should have gone to-morrow to your house —— You have not been ill, at any rate?"

"No, thank you —— All sorts of occupations ——"

"Listen, you must come to dinner to-morrow —— A family affair, no one but ourselves ——"

"You are too kind, we shall see ——"

And she seemed to be absorbed and to follow the chant, determined to make no further reply. Pauline had taken Jeanne beside her, to enable her to enjoy the radiator, over which she was slowly getting baked, with a sanctimonious and chilly enjoyment. Within the current of the warm air, they raised themselves and from curiosity examined each thing, the low ceiling divided into wood-work panels, the low columns connected by semicircular arches from which hung lustres, the pulpit in carved oak; and, above the frizzled heads, which moved with the swelling of the canticle, they penetrated even the dark corners of the aisles, the dim chapels whose gold decorations gleamed, and the baptistery which was shut

off by a railing, near the main door. But their glances always returned to the splendor of the choir, painted in bright colors and glistening with gildings; a blazing crystal lustre hung from the roof; immense candelabra in regular lines whose candles seemed ranged like steps, pierced with a shower of symmetrical stars the dark depths of the church, flooding with light the high altar, like a large bouquet of foliage and of flowers. Above, in a harvest of roses, a Virgin dressed in satin and lace, crowned with pearls, held on her arm a Jesus in a long robe.

"Eh! are you warm?" Pauline asked. "It is delightful."

But Jeanne, in ecstasy, was contemplating the Virgin in the midst of the flowers. She began to tremble. She was afraid she was no longer good, and she lowered her eyes, trying to be interested in the white and black tiles, so as not to weep. She felt in her hair the soft breath of the frail voices of the choir children.

Hélène, meanwhile, with her eyes on her prayer-book, turned aside each time that she felt Juliette

brush her with her lace. She was not prepared for that meeting. In spite of the oath that she had imposed upon herself to love Henri holily, without ever belonging to him, she felt uneasy on thinking that she was betraying that woman beside her, so trusting and gay. A single thought possessed her: she would not go to that dinner; and she sought how she could gradually break off relations that wounded her honor. But the swelling voices of the choristers, a few steps away, prevented her from reflecting; she could discover no means and she gave herself up to the soothing influence of the canticle, realizing a devotional comfort which, until then, she had never felt in a church.

"Has any one told you Madame de Chermette's history?" Juliette asked, giving away anew to her itch for talking.

"No, I know nothing."

"Well! imagine — You have seen her big daughter, who is so tall for her fifteen years? It is said that she is going to be married next year, and to that dark little fellow whom one always

sees clinging to his mother's petticoats — It is spoken of, it is spoken of —”

“Ah!” said Hélène, who was not listening.

Madame Deberle gave other details. But suddenly the canticle ceased, the organ groaned and stopped. Then she was silent, surprised at the loudness of her voice, in the midst of the meditative silence that took place. A priest had just appeared in the pulpit. There was a rustling; then he spoke. No, certainly, Hélène would not go to that dinner. Her eyes fixed on the priest, she pictured to herself that first interview with Henri, whom she had dreaded for three days past; she saw him pale from wrath, reproaching her with having shut herself up at home; and she was afraid of not showing enough coldness. In her reverie, the priest had disappeared, she heard only phrases, a penetrating voice, fallen from above, which said:

“That was an ineffable moment when the Virgin, inclining her head, answered: Behold the handmaid of the Lord —”

Oh! she would be brave, her full reason had returned. She would taste the joy of being loved,

but would never acknowledge her love, for she clearly felt that silence must be the price of her peace. And how deeply she would love, without confessing it, being satisfied with a word from Henri, with a look, exchanged from time to time, when chance should bring them together! It was a dream that filled her with a thought of eternity. The church, around her, became to her friendly and sweet. The priest said:

“The angel disappeared. Mary was absorbed in the contemplation of the divine mystery that was being wrought in her, inundated with light and love ——”

“He speaks very well ——,” murmured Madame Deberle as she leaned over. “And quite young, hardly thirty, is he?”

Madame Deberle was touched. Religion pleased her as an emotion of good taste. To give flowers to the churches, to have little dealings with the priests, polished folks, discreet and seemingly good, to go fashionably dressed to church where she affected to grant a worldly patronage to the God of the poor, were especial pleasures to her, the

more so that her husband did not practise these virtues and that her devotions assumed the taste of the forbidden fruit. Hélène looked at her and answered only by a nod. Both had a pleased and smiling countenance. A great noise of chairs and handkerchiefs was heard, the priest had left the pulpit, uttering this last exclamation:

“Oh! dilate your love, pious Christian souls, God has given Himself to you, your heart is full of His presence, your soul overflows with His graces!”

The organ pealed immediately after. The litanies of the Virgin were swelled out with their appeals of ardent tenderness. There came from the aisles, from the shadow of the dim chapels, a distant and hushed chant, as if the earth had answered the angelic voices of the choristers. A breath passed over the heads, depressed the straight flames of the candles, whilst, in her great bouquet of roses, in the midst of the flowers that were perishing while exhaling their last perfume, the divine Mother seemed to have lowered her head to smile on her Jesus.

Hélène turned suddenly, seized with an instinctive uneasiness.

"You are not ill, Jeanne?" she asked.

The child, very white, with her eyes moist, as if carried away by the torrent of love in the litanies, was gazing at the altar and saw the roses multiply and fall in showers.

She murmured:

"Oh! no, mamma —— I assure you, I am happy, quite happy ——"

Then she asked:

"Where, then, is our good friend?"

She was speaking of the Abbé. Pauline saw him; he was in a choir stall. But it was necessary to raise up Jeanne.

"Ah! I see him —— He is looking at us, he is making little eyes."

The Abbé "made little eyes," according to Jeanne, when he was laughing internally. Hélène then exchanged with him a friendly nod. It was to her, as it were, a certainty of peace, a last cause of serenity that made the church dear to her and lulled her with a happiness full of tolerance.

Censers were swung in front of the altar, light fumes ascended; the benediction was given, an ostensorium like a sun was raised slowly and swung above the heads bowed towards the floor. Hélène remained prostrate, in a blissful torpor, when she heard Madame Deberle saying:

“It is over, let us leave.”

The noise of chairs and the stamping of feet echoed under the vaulted roof. Pauline had taken Jeanne's hand. While walking ahead with the child, she questioned her.

“You have never been to the theatre?”

“No. Is it more beautiful?”

The little one, her heart swollen with heavy sighs, negatively tossed her chin, as if to declare that nothing could be more beautiful. But Pauline did not answer; she had just planted herself in front of a priest arrayed in his surplice, who was passing; and, when he was a few steps away:

“O! the fine head!” she said quite loud, with a conviction that made two devotees turn round.

Meantime, Hélène had arisen. She was walking beside Juliette, in the midst of the crowd that was

passing out with difficulty. Full of tenderness and as if weary and without strength, she was no longer troubled in feeling her so near her. For a moment, their bare hands brushed each other, and they smiled at each other. They were suffocating, Hélène wanted Juliette to pass out first, in order to protect her. Their whole intimacy seemed to have returned.

"It is understood, is it not?" Madame Deberle asked, "we count on you to-morrow evening."

Hélène had not the will to say no. She would see when they got into the street. At length they got out among the last. Pauline and Jeanne were waiting for them on the sidewalk opposite. They stopped on hearing a whining voice.

"Ah! my good lady, how long it is since I have had the happiness of seeing you!"

It was old dame Fétu. She was begging at the church door. Barring Hélène's passage, as if she had lain in wait for her, she continued:

"Ah! I was very sick, always here, in the belly, you know —— Now it is like hammer blows —— And nothing of any kind, my good lady ——

I have not dared to send you word — May the good God give it back to you."

Hélène had just slipped a coin into her hand, promising to think of her.

"See!" said Madame Deberle, who had remained standing under the porch, "some one is chatting with Pauline and Jeanne — Why, it is Henri!"

"Yes, yes," continued old dame Fétu, who was casting furtive glances at the two ladies, "it is the good doctor — I have seen him during the whole ceremony, he did not leave the sidewalk, he was waiting for you, quite sure. There is a holy man! I say it, because it is the truth, before God who hears us — Oh! I know you, madame; you have in him a husband who deserves to be happy — May Heaven hear your desires, may all its blessings be with you! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

And, in the thousand wrinkles of her face, shriveled like an old apple, her small eyes moved, restless and mischievous, looking from Juliette to Hélène, without its being clear which of the two

she was addressing while speaking of the good doctor. She accompanied her glances with a continual mumbling, in which fragments of whining phrases were mingled with devout exclamations.

Hélène was surprised and touched by Henri's reserve. He hardly dared to raise his eyes towards her. His wife having twitted him in regard to his opinions which kept him from entering a church, he simply explained that he had come to meet those ladies, while smoking a cigar; but Hélène knew that he had desired to see her again, to show her how wrong she was to dread any fresh brutality. Doubtless he had sworn, like her, to act with propriety. She did not question whether he could be honest to himself, it made her too unhappy to see him unhappy. And so on leaving the Deberles, in the Rue Vineuse, she said pleasantly :

“Well! it is understood, to-morrow at seven.”

The relations were then connected more closely than ever, a charming life began. To Hélène, it seemed as if Henri had never given way to a

minute's folly; she had dreamt that; they loved each other, but they would never again avow it, they would be contented in knowing it. Delightful were those hours, when, without speaking of their love, they were continually conversing with each other, by a gesture, by an inflection of voice, by silence, even. Everything brought them back to that love, everything bathed them in a passion which they carried with them, around them, as the only atmosphere in which they could live. And they had the excuse of their purity, they were playing in all consciousness that comedy of their heart, for they did not allow themselves a pressure of the hand, which gave an unparalleled pleasure to the simple greeting with which they met each other.

Each evening, those ladies made it a point to go to church. Madame Deberle, delighted, tasted a new pleasure there, affording her a slight change from the evenings spent in dancing, at concerts and first nights; she delighted in new sensations, and now no one met her unless she was accompanied by sisters and Abbés. The

religious principles that were imparted to her at the boarding-school she now remembered as a giddy-brained young woman, and they were manifested by little practices that amused her, just as if she had remembered the plays of her childhood. H  l  ne, grown up a stranger to all pious education, abandoned herself to the charms of the month of Mary exercises, happy in the joy that Jeanne seemed to derive from them. They dined earlier, they hurried Rosalie so as not to be late and so find themselves in poor seats. Then they called for Juliette on their way. One day they had taken Lucien; but he had behaved himself so badly that they now left him at home. On entering the warm church, ablaze with candles, they felt a chastening and calming sensation, which gradually became necessary to H  l  ne. When she had had doubts during the day, when oppressed by some vague anxiety on thinking of Henri, the church in the evening brought her renewed peace. The canticles ascended, overflowing with divine passion. The flowers, freshly cut, made the heavy air oppressive with their

perfume. She inhaled there all the first intoxication of spring, the adoration of the woman exalted to worship, and she became inebriated in that mystery of love and purity, in the presence of Mary, virgin and mother, crowned with her white roses. Each day she remained kneeling longer. She sometimes caught herself with her hands clasped. Then, the ceremony over, there was the sweetness of returning. Henri was waiting at the door, the evenings grew warm, they returned through the black and silent streets of Passy, exchanging few words.

"But you are becoming devout, my dear!" Madame Deberle said one evening, laughing.

It was true. Hélène admitted devotion into her fully-open heart. Never would she have believed that it was so good to love. She returned there as to a sympathetic spot, where her eyes might be moist, where she could remain without a thought, absorbed in silent adoration. Each evening, for an hour, she no longer restrained herself; the expanding love that she carried within her, that she repressed all day,

might at last mount from her breast, expand itself in prayers, in the presence of all, in the midst of the devout chilliness of the multitude. The lisped prayers, the kneeling, the salutations, those words and vague gestures incessantly repeated were lulling her, they seemed to her the one language, the same passion always, translated by the same word or the same sign. She wished to believe, she was enraptured with divine charity.

Nor did Juliette tease Hélène only, she pretended that Henri himself was becoming devout. It was possible he did not now enter the church to wait for them! An atheist, a pagan who declared he had sought for the soul with the point of his scalpel and had not yet found it! As soon as she saw him, at the back of the pulpit, standing behind a column, Juliette nudged Hélène's elbow.

"Look, he is already there — You know that he did not wish to go to confession for our marriage — No! he has an extraordinary countenance, he is contemplating us with a funny air! Look at him, then!"

Hélène did not look up at once. The ceremony was about to end, the incense smoked, the organ pealed forth briskly. But, as her friend was not a woman to leave her quiet, she had to answer.

"Yes, yes, I see him," she stammered, without turning her eyes.

She had divined his presence by the hosanna that she heard mounting from the whole church. Henri's breath seemed to reach her very nape, floating on the wing of the canticles, and she thought she saw behind her his glance lighting up the nave and enveloping it with a ray of gold, while she was kneeling. Then she prayed with a fervor so great that words failed her. He, very grave, had the correct mien of a husband who came in search of those ladies in the house of God, as he would have gone to wait for them in the lobby of a theatre. But, when they met, in the midst of the slowly departing devotees, both found themselves as if more closely united, united by those flowers and those chants; and they shunned speaking to each other, for they had their hearts on their lips.

After a fortnight, Madame Deberle grew weary. She jumped from one passion to another, tormented by the need of doing what everybody was doing. At present she was giving herself up to charity sales, ascending sixty flights during an afternoon, to go begging canvases from well-known painters, and passing her evenings presiding with a bell over the meetings of lady patrons — So, one Thursday evening, Hélène and her daughter found themselves alone at church. After the sermon, as the choristers were rendering the *Magnificat*, the young woman, warned by her throbbing heart, turned her head: Henri was there, in the usual place. Then, she remained with her head bowed until the end of the ceremony, awaiting the return.

“Ah! it is kind to have come!” said Jeanne on going out, with her childish familiarity. “I should have been afraid, in these dark streets.”

But Henri affected surprise. He thought he should meet his wife. Hélène allowed the little one to answer, she followed them without speaking. As they were all three passing under the porch, a voice wailed:

“Charity — God will give it back —”

Every evening, Jeanne slipped a ten-sou piece into old mother Fétu's hand. When the latter saw the doctor alone with Hélène, she simply shook her head, with a knowing air, instead of breaking out into noisy thanks, as customarily. And, the church being emptied, she began to follow them, dragging her feet and muttering indistinct words. Instead of returning by the Rue de Passy, those ladies sometimes went back by the Rue Raynouard, when the night was fine, thus prolonging the journey by five or six minutes. That evening, Hélène took the Rue Raynouard, desirous of shade and silence, yielding to the charm of that long, deserted way, lighted by gas at distant intervals, and without the shadow of a passer-by moving on the pavement.

At that hour, in that secluded quarter, Passy was already slumbering, with the light breath of a provincial city. Dwellings, girls' boarding-schools, dark and sleepy looking, eating-houses whose kitchens were still lighted, flanked the sidewalks. Not a shop broke the shadow with

the brilliancy of its window. It was a delight to Hélène and Henri to be in that solitude. He had not dared to offer her his arm. Jeanne walked between them, in the middle of the roadway, which was sanded like a park alley. The houses ceased, walls stretched out, over which fell mantles of clematis and tufts of lilac in flower. Large gardens separated the houses, at moments they could see through a railing dark backgrounds of verdure, on which lawns of a lighter tone looked pale among the trees, whilst, in vases that could be only indistinctly conjectured, bouquets of iris embalmed the air.

The warmth of that spring night, which bathed them with its perfumes, induced them to slacken their pace; and, when Jeanne, in childish play, advanced with her face raised towards heaven, she repeated:

“Oh! mamma, see, what a lot of stars!”

But, behind them, old mother Fétu's step seemed to be the echo of their own.

She came nearer; they heard this fragment of a Latin phrase: “*Ave Maria, gratia plena,*”

ceaselessly jabbered in the same tone. Old dame Fétu was saying her beads on returning home.

"I have a coin left, suppose I give it to her?" Jeanne asked her mother.

And, without waiting for the answer, she started off and ran to the old woman, who was about to enter the Passage des Eaux.

Dame Fétu took the coin, while invoking all the female saints in Paradise.

She had at the same time taken hold of the child's hand; she retained it, and, changing her voice, said:

"She is ill, then, the other lady?"

"No," Jeanne answered, astonished.

"Ah! may Heaven preserve her! may it load her with prosperity, her and her husband! — Do not run away, my good little girl. Let me say an *Ave Maria* on your mamma's behalf, and you will answer *Amen* with me — Your mamma allows it, you will overtake her."

Hélène and Henri, meantime, on thus finding themselves suddenly alone, had stood trembling in the shadow of a row of large chestnut-trees

that bordered the street. They quietly moved on a few steps. The chestnut-trees had covered the ground with the shower of their little blossoms, and they were walking on that rosy carpet. Then they stopped, their hearts too full to go farther.

"Pardon me," Henri merely said.

"Yes, yes," Hélène stammered. "I entreat you, say nothing."

But she had felt his hand brushing against her own. She drew back. Happily, Jeanne returned, running.

"Mamma, mamma!" she exclaimed, "she made me say an *Ave* in order to bring you happiness."

And the three turned into the Rue Vineuse, whilst old mother Fétu went down the stairway of the Passage des Eaux, finishing her beads.

The month rolled by. Madame Deberle showed herself at the services two or three times more. One Sunday, the last, Henri dared again to wait for Hélène and Jeanne. The walk home was delightful. That month had been one of extraordinary sweetness. The little church seemed to have been created to calm and prepare their passion.

Hélène had at first grown calm, happy for that refuge of religion in which she thought she could love without shame; but the silent force had continued, and when she awoke from her devout torpor, she felt herself invaded, tied by bonds that would have torn her flesh away had she wanted to break them.

Henri continued respectful. Nevertheless, she plainly saw a flush remounting to his face. She feared some outburst of mad desire. She was afraid of herself, moved by sudden attacks of passion.

One afternoon, on returning from a walk with Jeanne, she took the Rue de l'Annonciation and entered the church. The little one was complaining of great fatigue.

She enjoyed the evening ceremony so thoroughly that until the last moment she had refused to acknowledge that it was tiring her out; but her cheeks had become as pale as wax, and the doctor advised that she should take long rambles.

"Stay there," said her mother. "You will rest yourself — We will remain only ten minutes."

She had seated her near a pillar. She herself knelt, a few chairs farther on. At the lower end of the nave workmen were taking down decorations, and removing flower-pots, as the exercises of the month of Mary had ended the previous evening. Hélène, with her face buried in her hands, saw nothing, heard nothing, but was questioning herself anxiously whether she ought not to acknowledge to the Abbé Jouve the terrible crisis through which she was passing. He would give her advice. He would perhaps restore her lost peace to her. But in her innermost self an overflowing joy mounted from her very anguish. She nursed her sorrow, she trembled lest the priest should succeed in curing her. The ten minutes passed by, an hour elapsed. She was engulfed in her heart's struggle.

And as she at last raised her head, her eyes moistened with tears, she perceived the Abbé Jouve beside her, looking at her with an air of sorrow. It was he who was directing the workmen. He had just advanced, on recognizing Jeanne.

"What ails you, then, my child?" he asked H  l  ne, who rose to her feet quickly and wiped away her tears.

She found no answer, fearing lest she should again fall on her knees and burst into sobs. He approached nearer and gently continued:

"I do not want to interrogate you, but why not confide in me, in the priest, and no longer in the friend?"

"Later on," she stammered, "later on, I promise you."

Jeanne had at first been very patient, amusing herself by examining the windows, the statues of the main door, the scenes of the Way of the Cross, done in small bas-reliefs, along the lateral naves.

Gradually the freshness of the church had fallen on her like a shroud; and, in that lassitude that kept her even from thinking, she grew uneasy at the religious silence of the chapels, at the prolonged echoes of the slightest noises, in that sacred place in which it seemed to her that she was about to die. But her great and especial grief was to see the flowers carried away.

Part Third Chapter I

Then Jeanne uttered a faint cry, extended her arms and became rigid, writhing in the crisis that had threatened her for some days.



In proportion as the big bouquets of roses disappeared, the altar was shown, bare and cold. Those marbles froze her, without a candle, without a breath of incense.

For a moment, the Virgin vested in lace, wavered, then fell backwards into the arms of two workmen.

Then Jeanne uttered a faint cry, extended her arms and became rigid, writhing in the crisis that had threatened her for some days.

And when Hélène, carefully tending her, was able to take her away in a hack, aided by the Abbé, who was greatly grieved, she turned round towards the porch, her hands extended and trembling.

"It is this church! it is this church!" she repeated vehemently and in a tone which expressed both regret and reproach for the month of holy tenderness that she had enjoyed there.

II

In the evening, Jeanne felt better. She was able to get up. To reassure her mother, she insisted on doing so and dragged herself into the dining-room, where she sat down before an empty plate.

"It will be nothing," she said, trying to smile. "You know very well that I am run down — But you must eat, I want you to eat."

And seeing that her mother was looking at her becoming pale and trembling, and unable to swallow a mouthful, at last she feigned to have an appetite. She would take a little pastry, she solemnly promised. Then Hélène hurried, whilst the child, smiling still, with a slight nervous trembling of the head, watched her with a look of adoration. At dessert, she tried to keep her promise. But tears trembled on her eyelids.

"It does not go, you see," she murmured. "It isn't necessary to scold me."

She felt a terrible weakness that overcame her. Her legs seemed to be dead, an iron hand clasped her shoulders. But she forced herself to be brave, she restrained the slight cries that were wrung from her by the shooting pains in the neck. For a moment she forgot herself, her head was too heavy, and she shrunk under the suffering. And her mother, on seeing her look pinched, and so weak and adorable, could not finish the pear that she was forcing herself to eat. Sobs were strangling her. She dropped her napkin, and went to take Jeanne in her arms.

"My child, my child," she stammered, her heart rent by the sight of that dining-room, where the little one had so often amused her by her gormandizing, when she was well.

Jeanne sat upright again, and tried to recover her smile.

"Do not worry yourself, it will be nothing, truly — Now that you have finished, you are going to put me to bed again — I wanted to

see you at table, for I know you, you would not have swallowed a big piece of bread like that."

Hélène carried her away. She had rolled her little bed near her own, in the bed-chamber. When Jeanne was stretched out, covered up to the chin, she felt much better. She only complained of dull pains in the back of the head. Then she became loving, her passionate affection appeared to increase as soon as she suffered. Hélène had to kiss her and swear that she loved her dearly, also to promise to kiss her again, when she was lying down.

"It makes no difference if I'm asleep," Jeanne repeated. "I feel you all the same."

She shut her eyes and went to sleep. Hélène remained near her, to watch her slumber. Rosalie came on tiptoe to ask her if she might retire, and she answered her with an affirmative nod. Eleven o'clock struck, Hélène was still there, when she thought she heard a slight tapping on the landing door. She was very much surprised, and, taking the lamp, went to see.

"Who is there?"

"I, open," replied a smothered voice.

It was Henri's voice. She opened the door quickly, considering this visit natural. No doubt the doctor had just learned of Jeanne's attack, and he hurried, although she had not sent for him, restrained by a sort of modesty at the thought of having him count for half in her daughter's health.

But Henri did not give her time to speak. He had followed her into the dining-room, trembling, and with flushed face.

"I entreat you, excuse me," he stammered, as he took hold of her hand. "It is three days since I have seen you, I have not been able to resist the desire to see you."

Hélène had freed her hand. He drew back, his eyes fixed on her, continuing:

"Fear nothing, I love you —— I would have remained at your door, if you had not opened for me. Oh! I know well that all this is folly, but I love you, I love you ——"

She listened to him with a grave manner and a mute severity that tortured him. In the face of that reception, the flood of his passion broke loose.

"Ah! why do we play this atrocious comedy? — I can do so no longer, my heart would burst; I should do some mad thing, worse than on that evening; I would take you in the presence of all, and I would carry you off —"

A maddened desire made him reach out his arms. He had moved closer, and kissed her dress, his feverish hands were wandering. She stood erect, chilling.

"Then, you know nothing?" she asked.

He seized her bare wrist under the open sleeve of her dressing-gown, and as he covered it with eager kisses, she at last became impatient.

"Nonsense! You must see that I do not at all understand you. Am I dreaming these things!"

She became calm, she put her question a second time.

"You know nothing, then? — Well! my daughter is ill. I am pleased to see you, you are going to reassure me."

Taking the lamp, she walked first; but, on the threshold, she turned around and with a clear glance said severely:

"I forbid you to repeat here — Never, never!"

He entered behind her, still trembling and but imperfectly understanding what she said to him. In the room, at that hour of night, amid the scattered linens and garments, he breathed anew that vervain odor which had troubled him so much the first evening that he had seen H  l  ne with her hair disheveled and her shawl slipping from her shoulders. To again find himself there kneeling, to drink in all that fragrance of love that was floating there, and in adoration, to thus wait for daylight, and to forget himself in the possession of his dream! His temples throbbed, he supported himself on the child's little iron bed.

"She is asleep," said H  l  ne in a low voice. "Look at her —"

He did not hear, his passion refused to be silent. She had stooped in front of him, he had observed her nape adorned with fine curly locks. To resist the desire to kiss her on that spot, he shut his eyes.

"Doctor, see, she is burning —— It is not serious, do you say?"

The mad desire that was working in his mind allowed him only to feel Jeanne's pulse mechanically, yielding to the habit of his profession. But the struggle was too strong, he remained motionless for a moment, without appearing to know that he was holding that poor little hand in his.

"Tell me, has she a high fever?"

"A high fever, you think?" he repeated.

The little hand warmed his. The silence was renewed. The doctor awoke in him. He counted the pulsations. The flame was being extinguished in his eyes. Gradually, his face grew pale, he stooped, restless, looking at Jeanne attentively. Then he murmured:

"The attack is very violent, you are right —— My God! the poor child!"

His desire was dead, he now had only an anxiety to aid her. All his coolness returned. He had sat down and questioned the mother about the facts that had preceded the attack, when the little one awoke, groaning. She was

complaining of a frightful headache. The pains in her neck and in her shoulders had become so intense that she could no longer move without sobbing. Hélène, kneeling at the other side of the bed, was smiling on her, her heart rent at seeing her suffer thus.

"There is some one, then, mamma?" she asked on turning and observing the doctor.

"It is a friend, you know him."

The child examined him for an instant, pensive and as if hesitating. Then a tender look passed over her countenance.

"Yes, yes, I know him. I love him well."

And with her wheedling air:

"I must be made well, monsieur, must I not? — so that mamma may be happy — I will drink all that you give me, truly."

The doctor had felt her pulse again, Hélène held her other hand; and lying between them, and as she looked attentively at one after the other,—her head slightly, nervously trembling,—it seemed as if she had never seen them so well.

Then she became uneasy. Her little hands stiffened and held them :

“Do not go away ; I am afraid —— Protect me, keep all those people from approaching me —— I want only you, I want only you two, quite near, oh ! quite near, close to me, together ——”

She drew them, brought them together in a convulsive manner, repeating :

“Together, together ——”

The delirium thus reappeared on several occasions. During the moments of calm, Jeanne was overcome by fits of drowsiness, when she seemed not to breathe, as if dead. When she started with a leap out of those brief naps, she heard nothing, she saw nothing, her eyes were veiled by a white mist. The doctor watched during a part of the night, for the child was very sick. He had gone down for an instant only, to get a potion himself. Towards morning, when he left, Hélène accompanied him anxiously into the anteroom.

“Well ?” she asked.

“Her condition is very serious,” he replied ;
“but do not doubt, I entreat you ; rely on

me —— I will return this morning at ten o'clock."

Hélène, on re-entering the room, found Jeanne sitting up in bed, looking around her in a wandering way.

"You left me, you left me!" she exclaimed. "Oh! I am afraid, I do not want to be all alone ——"

Her mother kissed her to console her, but she was constantly seeking some one.

"Where is he? Oh! tell him not to go away —— I want him to be here, I want ——"

"He is going to return, my angel," repeated Hélène, who was mingling her own tears with her daughter's. "He will not leave us, I swear it to you. He loves us too much —— Let us see, be good, lie down again. As for me, I will remain here, I am waiting for him to return."

"Really, truly?" murmured the child, who gradually fell into a deep sleep.

Terrible days ensued, there were three weeks of bitter anguish. The fever did not cease for an hour. Jeanne enjoyed a little calm only when

the doctor was there and she had given him one of her little hands, while her mother held the other. She took refuge in them, she divided between them her tyrannical adoration, as if she understood the nature of the protection afforded her by their solicitous tenderness. Her exquisitely nervous sensibility, made still more delicate by the malady, doubtless warned her that only a miracle worked by their love could save her. For hours she looked at them with serious and searching glances, as they remained at each side of her bed. Human passion, seen into and guessed at in its entirety, was expressed in that look of a little dying girl. She did not speak, all her thoughts found utterance in a warm pressure, which entreated them not to go away, and told them the comfort that she felt in seeing them thus. When, after an absence, the doctor reappeared, she was enraptured, and her eyes, that had not left the door, were filled with light; then, she fell asleep peacefully, reassured on hearing them, him and her mother, moving about her and chatting in a low tone.

On the morning following the attack, Doctor Bodin presented himself. Jeanne refused to allow herself to be examined, pouting and turning away her head.

"Not him, mamma," she murmured, "not him, I entreat you."

As he returned the following day, Hélène had to speak to him of the child's repugnance. And so the old doctor did not again enter the room. He went up every other day, asked for news, and chatted sometimes with his confrère, Doctor Deberle, who treated him deferentially on account of his great age.

Besides, it was no use trying to deceive Jeanne. Her senses were extremely keen. The Abbé and Monsieur Rambaud called each evening, and sat there, spending an hour in heart-rending silence. One evening, as the doctor was going away, Hélène made a sign to Monsieur Rambaud to take his place and to hold the little one's hand, so that she would not notice her kind friend's departure. But, after two or three minutes, Jeanne awoke, opened her eyes, and rapidly withdrew her

hand. Then she wept, and said that they were acting unkindly toward her.

"You no longer love me, you no longer want me, then?" repeated poor Monsieur Rambaud, with tears in his eyes.

She looked at him without answering, it seemed as if she did not wish even to recognize him. And the good man returned to his corner, his heart full. At last he entered noiselessly and slipped into the recess of a window, where, half-concealed behind a curtain, he remained for the evening, stunned with chagrin, looking fixedly at the patient. The Abbé, with his large head on his lean shoulders, was there also, very pale. He blew his nose noisily to conceal his tears. The danger that his little friend incurred upset him to such an extent that he forgot his poor.

But it was useless for the two brothers to withdraw to the farther end of the room, Jeanne felt them there; they troubled her, she turned around with an uneasy air, even when she was drowsy from the fever. Her mother then leaned over her to hear the words that she was muttering.

"Oh! mamma, I am sick! — All this is stifling me — Send the people away, at once, at once —"

Hélène, as gently as possible, explained to the two brothers that the little one wanted to sleep. They understood, and departed with bowed heads. As soon as they had left, Jeanne breathed freely, cast a glance around the room, and then with infinite sweetness rested her looks on her mother and on the doctor.

"Good-evening," she murmured. "I am easy, stay here."

For three weeks, she kept them thus. Henri had at first come twice a day, then he spent the entire evening, he gave up all his spare hours to the child. At first, he had dreaded typhoid fever; but symptoms so contradictory presented themselves that he soon became very much perplexed. He was no doubt face to face with one of those chloro-anæmic affections so hard to reach, whose complications are terrible at the age when the woman is forming in the child. In turn he dreaded a lesion of the heart and the

premonitory symptoms of phthisis. What disturbed him was Jeanne's nervous excitement which he was unable to calm, and especially that intense, obstinate fever, which refused to yield to the most energetic remedies. In order to overcome it he exerted all his energy and skill, with the single thought that he was caring for his own happiness, his very life. A great silence, burdened with solemn expectation, came over him; not once, during those three weeks of anxiety, was his passion aroused; he no longer shivered under Hélène's breath, and when their looks met, they expressed the friendly sadness of two beings menaced by a common misfortune.

Every minute, however, their hearts became more closely united. They now lived only on the same thought. As soon as he arrived, he learned, by looking at her, how Jeanne had passed the night, and she needed no words to know how he found the patient. Then, too, with her splendid motherly courage, she had made him swear not to deceive her but to tell his fears. Always up and about, not having slept three hours in succession

in twenty nights, she showed superhuman strength and tranquillity, tearless, subduing her despair so as to keep her mind clear in that struggle with her child's malady. An immense void had been produced in her and around her, in which the surrounding world, her hourly feelings, the very consciousness of her own existence, had vanished. Nothing existed any longer. She held to life only by that cherished agonized creature and that man who promised her a miracle. It was he, and he alone, whom she saw, whom she heard, whose slightest words assumed a supreme importance, to whom she unreservedly gave herself up, dreaming of being in him and imparting to him her strength. Secretly, invincibly, that possession was brought about. When Jeanne passed through an hour's crisis almost every evening, at the moment when the fever redoubled, they were there, silent and alone, in the damp room; and, in spite of themselves, as if they had desired to feel themselves allied against death, their hands met on the edge of the bed, a long embrace brought them together,

trembling from anxiety and sympathy, until a child's feeble sigh, a calm and regular breathing, warned them that the crisis was over. Then, with a nod of the head, they reassured each other. This time again, their love had conquered. And each time their embrace became stronger, they were united more closely.

One evening, Hélène guessed that Henri was concealing something from her. For ten minutes he examined Jeanne, without a word. The little one was complaining of intolerable thirst; she was strangling and a continuous wheezing was heard in her parched throat. Then drowsiness overcame her, her face became very red, and she grew so dull that she could not even raise her eyelids. She remained inert, and except for the wheezing, one would have thought that she was dead.

"You think she is very sick, do you not?" Hélène asked sharply.

He answered no, that there had been no change. But he was very pale, and remained seated, crushed by his helplessness. Then, in spite of

the tension of her whole being, she sank on a chair, on the other side of the bed.

"Tell me all. You have sworn to tell me all —— She is doomed? ——"

And, as he remained silent, she continued vehemently :

"You see that I am strong —— Am I weeping? am I in despair? —— Speak. I want to know the truth."

Henri looked at her steadily. He spoke slowly.

"Well," he said, "if within an hour from now she does not come out of that sleep, it will be over."

There was no sob from Hélène. She was quite cold, with a terror that lifted her hair. Her eyes were directed on Jeanne, she fell on her knees and took her child in her arms, with a superb expression of possession and as if to guard her, pressed her to her shoulder. For a long minute she leaned her face quite close to hers, absorbing her with her look, wishing to give her of her own breath, of her own life. The little patient's panting respiration became shorter.

"There is nothing to be done, then?" she continued, raising her head. "Why do you rest there? Do something ——"

He made a sign of discouragement.

"Do something —— Do I know? No matter what. There must be something to be done —— You are not going to let her die. It is not possible!"

"I will do all that is possible," the doctor merely said.

He had risen. Then began a supreme struggle. All his coolness and all his decision as a practitioner returned. Until then he had not dared to use violent means, fearing lest he should weaken that little body already so poor in vitality. He no longer hesitated, he sent Rosalie to get a dozen leeches; and he did not conceal from the mother that it was a desperate experiment, which might save or kill her child. When the leeches were brought, she had a momentary weakening.

"Oh! my God," she murmured, "my God, if you kill her ——"

He had to force her to consent.

"Well! apply them, but may Heaven inspire you!"

She still held Jeanne and refused to get up, wishing to keep her head on her shoulder. He spoke no more and with a calm face was absorbed in the effort that he was making. At first, the leeches did not take hold. The minutes passed, only the pendulum of the clock in the large room bathed in shadow gave out its pitiless and persistent sound. Each second bore away a hope. The clothes being thrown back, exposed Jeanne's lovely but suffering limbs, which, under the circle of yellow light that fell from the lamp-shade, were of a waxen paleness. Hélène, her eyes dry, choking, was looking at those little members already lifeless; and, to see a drop of her daughter's blood, she would willingly have given all her own. At last, a red drop appeared, the leeches were taking hold. One by one, they became attached. The child's life was decided. They were terrible minutes, pregnant with emotion. Was that the last breath, that sigh which Jeanne heaved? was it the return of life? For

an instant Hélène, feeling her grow stiff, believed that she was passing away, and she had a mad desire to tear away those beasts that were drinking so ghoulishly; but a superior strength held her back, she remained open-mouthed and icy. The pendulum continued to beat, the room, as if it were anxious, seemed to be expectant.

The child moved. Her heavy eyelids were raised, then she closed them again, as if astonished and weary. A slight stir, like a breath, passed over her countenance. She moved her lips. Hélène, greedy, rigid, leaned over in intense expectation.

"Mamma, mamma," Jeanne murmured.

Henri then came to the pillow, near the young woman, saying:

"She is saved."

"She is saved —, she is saved —," Hélène repeated, stammering, inundated with such joy that she had slipped to the floor, close to the bed, looking first at her daughter, then at the doctor, with a mad air.

Then, with a wild impulse, she rose and threw herself on Henri's neck.

"Ah! I love you!" she exclaimed.

She kissed him, she pressed him to her. It was her avowal, that avowal so long delayed, which, in that heart crisis, at last escaped her.

The mother and lover were one at that delicious moment; she offered her love which her gratitude had set on fire.

"I am weeping, you see, I may weep," she stammered. "My God! how I love you, and how happy we shall be!"

She chatted familiarly with him, she sobbed. Her tears, whose spring had been dried up for three weeks, trickled down her cheeks. She remained in his arms, caressing and familiar as a child, carried away in that blossoming of all her tenderness. Then she fell back on her knees and picked up Jeanne once more to lull her to sleep against her shoulder; and from time to time, whilst her daughter was reposing, she looked at Henri with eyes that were moist through the power of her passion.

It was a night of happiness. The doctor stayed very late. Stretched out in her bed, covered up

to the chin, her fine brown head in the centre of the pillow, Jeanne shut her eyes without sleeping, soothed and oblivious. The lamp, placed on the table that had been rolled near the fire-place, lit up only one end of the room, leaving H  l  ne and Henri in a dim shadow, seated at their accustomed places on the two sides of the narrow bed. The child did not separate them, but, on the contrary, brought them together and added with her innocence to their first evening's love. Both were experiencing a calm, after the long days of anguish that they had just spent. At last, they found themselves side by side, with their hearts more fully expanded; and they realized clearly that they loved each other more amid those common terrors and joys, from which they emerged trembling. The room became an accomplice, so warm, so discreet, and filled with that sanctity that casts its affecting silence around a patient's bed. H  l  ne from time to time arose, went on tiptoe to get a draught, to turn up the lamp, or to give an order to Rosalie; whilst the doctor, who followed her with his looks,

made a sign to her to walk gently. Then, when she was seated again, they exchanged a smile. They did not speak a word, they were interested only in Jeanne, who was, as it were, their very love. But, sometimes, while being concerned about her, when they lifted up the covering or when they raised her head, their hands met and they forgot themselves for an instant beside each other. It was the only caress, involuntary and furtive, which they allowed themselves.

"I am not sleeping," Jeanne murmured, "I know well enough that you are there."

Then they brightened up on hearing her speak. Their hands were separated, they had no other desires. The child satisfied them and calmed them.

"You are well, my darling?" H  l  ne asked, when she saw her move.

Jeanne did not answer at once. She was talking as if in a dream.

"Oh! yes, I do not feel any more — But I hear you, it gives me pleasure."

Then, after an instant, raising her eyelids with an effort, she looked at them, and smiling divinely, again shut her eyes.

Next day, when the Abbé and Monsieur Rambaud presented themselves, Hélène manifested a momentary impatience. They were disturbing her in her corner of happiness. And as they questioned her, trembling lest they should learn bad news, she was cruel enough to tell them that Jeanne was not getting better. She gave that answer without reflection, urged by the selfish need of reserving for Henri and herself the joy of having saved her and of being alone in knowing it. Why should any one wish to share their happiness? It belonged to them, and if any one had known it, it would have seemed lessened to her. She would have believed that a stranger was entering into her love.

The priest had approached the bed.

"Jeanne, it is we, your good friends — Don't you recognize us? —"

She nodded her head gravely. She recognized them, but did not wish to talk, she was pensive,

and looked toward her mother, expressing her sympathetic intelligence. And the two good men went away, more heart-broken than on the other evenings.

Three days later, Henri allowed the patient to eat her first boiled egg. It was quite a great event. Jeanne positively wanted to eat it alone with her mother and the doctor, the door shut. As Monsieur Rambaud was there just then, she whispered to her mother, who was already spreading a napkin on the bed, instead of a tablecloth:

“Wait until he has left.”

Then, as soon as he had gone:

“Immediately, immediately — It is better when there is nobody.”

Hélène had raised her up in bed, whilst Henri put two pillows behind her to support her. With the napkin spread out and a plate on her knees, Jeanne was waiting with a smile.

“I am going to break it for you, shall I?” her mother asked.

“Yes, that will do, mamma.”

"And as for me, I am going to cut you three slices of bread," said the doctor.

"Oh! four, I shall certainly eat four of them, you will see."

She talked familiarly with the doctor now. When he gave her the first slice, she seized his hand, and as she had kept her mother's, she kissed both of them, going from one to the other with the same passionate affection.

"Come, be good," continued H  l  ne, who saw her almost breaking out into sobs; "eat your egg so as to give us pleasure."

Jeanne commenced; but she was so weak that after the second slice she found herself quite tired. She smiled at each mouthful she took, saying that her teeth were soft. Henri was encouraging her, the tears were ready to flow from H  l  ne's eyes. Oh, God! to see her child eating! She watched the bread, that first egg had moved her to her heart's depths. The thought suddenly recurred to her of Jeanne, dead, stiff under a shroud, and it froze her. And she ate, ate so daintily, but slowly, with the nicety of a convalescent!

“You will not scold, mamma —— I am doing what I can, I am now at my third slice —— Are you happy?”

“Yes, quite happy, my darling —— You do not know all the joy that you give me.”

In the excess of happiness that choked her, she forgot herself and leaned against Henri's shoulder. Both were laughing at the child. But the latter gradually grew troubled: she glanced furtively at them, then she drooped her head, eating no more, whilst a shadow of distrust and anger made her pale. It was necessary to lay her down again.

